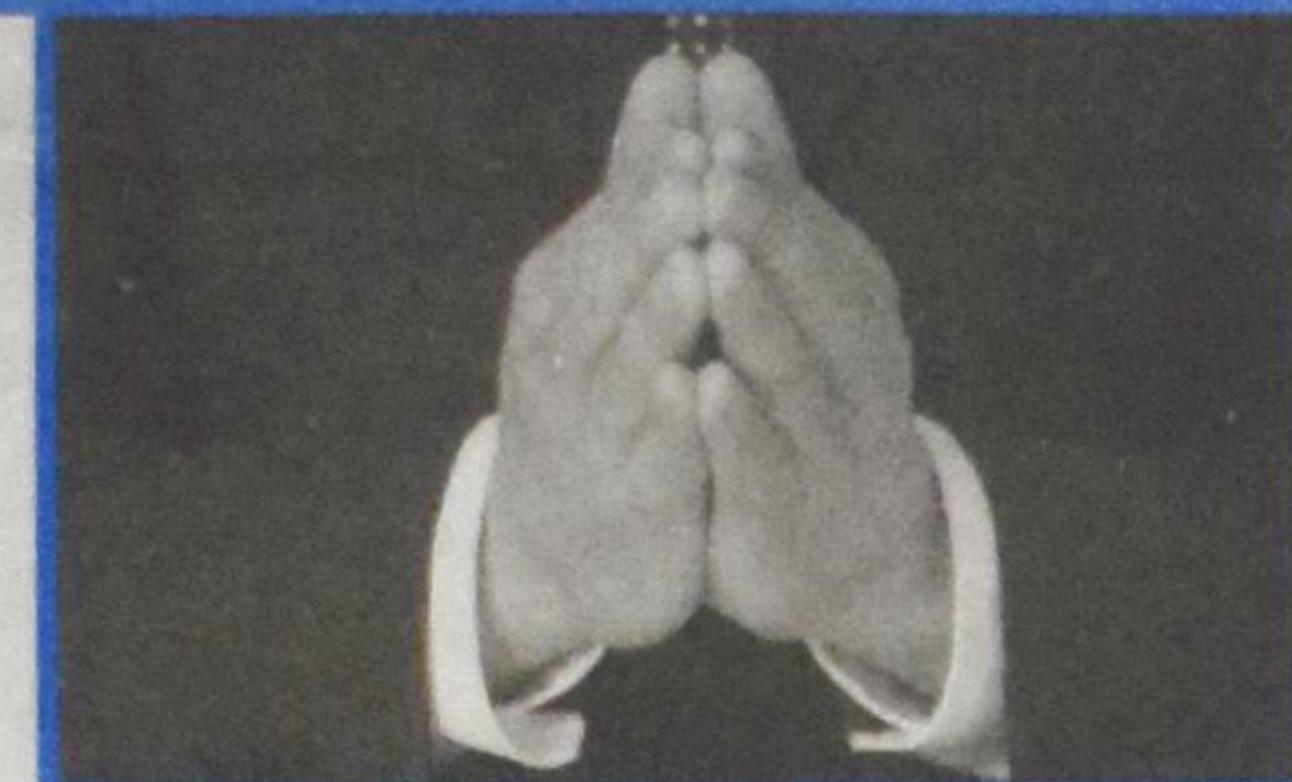


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## Christianity and the oil sands

**Nathan VanderKlippe**

The gates of hell lie roughly 450 kilometres north-east of Edmonton. Billowing stacks stab the horizon. Gaping pits expose broad expanses of blackened soil, as if a great scab has been torn from earth. What's left is naked soil, bereft of trees and bleeding a form of oil so thick that, at room temperature, it more closely resembles an inky peanut butter than the stuff you might pour into a fuel tank.

The oil sands have all the subtlety of Mordor.

The visual stain is only one part of the unsightliness. The energy it takes to strip all that oil from the ground produces enough emissions that the oil sands have become more than just an eyesore. To some, they have become morally repugnant.

KAIROS Canada, a Christian social justice advocacy has voiced outrage at development of the oil sands, an industrial project that it sees as violating principles of social and climate justice. It produced a paper attacking the value of oil sands jobs – which tend to flow to men, separate families and generate value for foreign shareholders – and questioning the “spiritual and theological implications of destroying whole ecosystems in the human pursuit of unsustainable and unrenewable sources of energy.”

Yet such a conclusion begs a difficult question: if the oil sands are an ethical quagmire, how can that be reconciled with the Christians who work and live – and, indeed, see their divine calling in – working for this industry? Church members, after all, occupy senior leadership positions in some



*“Billowing stacks stab the horizon. Gaping pits expose broad expanses of blackened soil, as if a great scab has been torn from earth.... The oil sands have all the subtlety of Mordor.”*

oil sands projects. One of the most important worker representatives in the oil sands is the Christian Labour Association of Canada; many of those it represents aren't Christian, but its own employees largely are. And the energy industry, including the oil sands, financially supports a hefty percentage of the Christians in Alberta, a province heavily dependent upon oil and gas.

“Whether it's Fort McMurray, Edmonton or Calgary, the oil industry is basically in all of our churches – and basically runs all of our budgets,” says Bonnie Hodge, executive pastor of the Fort McMurray Alliance Church.

### A struggle

That's not to say those who draw their livelihoods from the oil sands don't question the ties between how they spend their Sundays and what they do the rest of the week.

“How do I reconcile my belief system – and how I view creation and what I believe God put into place – with we're doing to it in exploiting the oil sands?” says Jay Bueckert, regional director in Fort McMurray for CLAC.

“The truth is, I struggle with it. And I think most of us struggle with it.”

But in seven years of working in Fort McMurray, he has come to recognize that rejecting this industry “is not going to make it go away. So I am firmly of the belief that I live in the world – and if I'm going to be in this area, I need to be here as an element of positive change.”

There is, in fact, a strong sense of mission among Christians who have

spent much of their professional lives in and around the oil sands. Sid Dykstra first worked for Syncrude, one of the oldest and most important oil sands companies, in 1979 as a summer student. It was “a cool experience,” and in the years that followed, he came to embrace the opportunities afforded by the energy industry. He also came to embrace the way it fuels modern life.

“We provide a commodity that actually makes life a whole lot better for a whole lot of people,” he says. “It's a good business, not a bad business.”

Dykstra is intimately familiar with the oil sands. In 2001, he became CEO of OPTI Canada, a

*See Oil sands on page 2*

## Obama's achievements

**Christian Bell**

In December, my wife and I spent an afternoon in New York City walking around the Statue of Liberty. Looking up at that New Colossus standing boldly against a cobalt sky inspired in me an intemperate pride in the delight of being called, in shorthand, “American.”

And yet that pride diminishes quickly in this election year with the arrival of January and its accompanying din of democracy. Even as I write this, pugilists on stage at a Republican debate are stringing together a barrage of invective against Barack Obama. Unemployment, the deficit, wars, healthcare – to hear all the ways a single man can fail seems to affirm



*“Obama reduced the size of the American military and ended the longstanding policy of maintaining a large enough army to fight two wars at once.”*

thoroughly, if unintentionally, the doctrine of total depravity.

Imperfection is a fact of life in politics; indeed, it's become a common line of defence for

Obama's supporters to argue that no one person could meet the expectations generated by the 2008 presidential campaign. And while *See Achievements on page 2*

## News

**Oil sands** *continued*

company that helped develop Long Lake, a major oil sands project that cost \$6.1 billion to build. He served with OPTI until 2009, and is “unabashedly in favour of” the oil sands. Yes, ducks have died in toxic lagoons of mine effluent. Yes, “they look ugly,” Dykstra says. “There’s no argument about that.”

But plenty of other industries sully the earth: “Whether it’s oil and gas or forestry or mining – and farming should not be excluded from the list – it has a significant impact on land and air and water.” The real yardstick, Dykstra argues, should be whether companies are working responsibly, “and the energy industry does a fabulous job of being very responsible.” He points to significant decreases in oil sands use of energy and water, per barrel it produces, over the past few decades.

“I would defend industry’s record – not at all be embarrassed by it,” he says.



*Critics of the oil sands often bring up the fact that ducks have died in lagoons of toxic mine effluent.*

**Realizing potential**

In fact, there are aspects of the oil sands that are a window into God’s character, says Phil Reinders, who

spent 14 years as a pastor at River Park Church in Calgary, the urban headquarters for most oil sands companies. He points to the immense entrepreneurial creativity that has succeeded in wringing energy from blackened, buried sand

– a technological feat considered impossible not long ago.

“Here they are taking this bitumen and doing some spectacular things with it,” he says. “That is so reflective of God himself, and that creational mandate.”

Because, he argues, Christians aren’t called to just gaze at creation. Take the definition of work proffered by Tim Keller, the pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York: “Rearranging the raw materials of a particular domain to draw out its potential for the flourishing of everyone.” There is little doubt that many do flourish from the oil sands: trades workers, manufacturers, car drivers. Much of this country benefits from oil sands economic contributions. Much of this continent benefits from oil sands energy.

That’s not to say there aren’t issues – in particular when it comes to the flourishing of the created world amidst a huge Alberta industrial development. But if one definition of Christian shalom is a “flourishing of every sector,” then “I see a lot of signs of that in the oil sands,” Reinders says.

Besides, he adds, there’s something more fundamental at play.

“God places Adam in this context of just raw materials and says work it. We’re called to do that. We’re not called just to let stuff sit there.”



*Nathan VanderKlippe covers business in Alberta for The Globe and Mail. He has visited many of Canada’s oil sands sites.*

**Achievements** *continued*

this is true, it greatly emaciates what has been an impressive and accomplished presidency – a presidency that deserves a second term.

Consider first Obama’s lengthy legislative successes. His signature healthcare reform legislation will extend health insurance coverage to tens of millions of Americans, bucking the current trend in which one in six Americans lacks health insurance coverage and another million loses it each year. Healthcare reform also abolishes lifetime limits on health insurance coverage, and requires insurers to cover at no additional cost routine preventative care such as mammograms and colonoscopies.

In separate legislation, Obama got Congress to ratify New START, which will cut in half the number of nuclear missile launchers kept by the United States and Russia. Obama was also successful in getting Congress to repeal the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy that prevented openly LGBT persons from serving in the military. Emission standards for automobiles were significantly raised. Funding for embryonic stem cell research was eased. The list could go on.

Victories came overseas as well. Al Qaeda leaders have been captured or killed, most notably Osama bin Laden; what remains is a disorganized menagerie of cowards in caves. As Obama promised, the war in Iraq was ended, and all American troops were brought home. And by not involving the United States in the Arab Spring movement, Obama kept American troops out of another foreign conflict, while simultaneously allowing a democratic uprising to grow and take shape organically.

And in a matter that didn’t receive the attention it warranted, Obama announced a reduction in the overall size of the American military and an end to the long-held doctrine of maintaining a military large enough to engage in two wars simultaneously. I suggest this demilitarization is reason enough to re-elect him.

**Economic recovery**

Ultimately, though, none of these accomplishments will matter to the American people nearly as much as how the economy is doing. Conventional wisdom holds that the

economy is the Achilles’ heel for incumbent presidents, and indeed the economy is far worse than anyone would hope.

Even so, there are signs of recovery: Since hitting bottom in early 2010, the United States economy has added 2.4 million jobs. And the automotive industry – long a staple of the American economy – was saved from catastrophic bankruptcy; in my own state of Michigan, hundreds of thousands were saved. Canada too, in particular Ontario, has benefited strongly from this.

We were warned as far back as 2008 that growing out of the recession would be a slow and painful process, and indeed it has been. But growth is happening, thanks in no small part to stimulus efforts led by the Obama administration: banks were kept from collapsing; long-overdue roadwork was completed; bridges were rebuilt; community food markets were financed; and on and on.

All of this, taken together, presents itself as an impressive record, but what is most impressive is the scope of the work: Obama’s agenda is only half-finished.

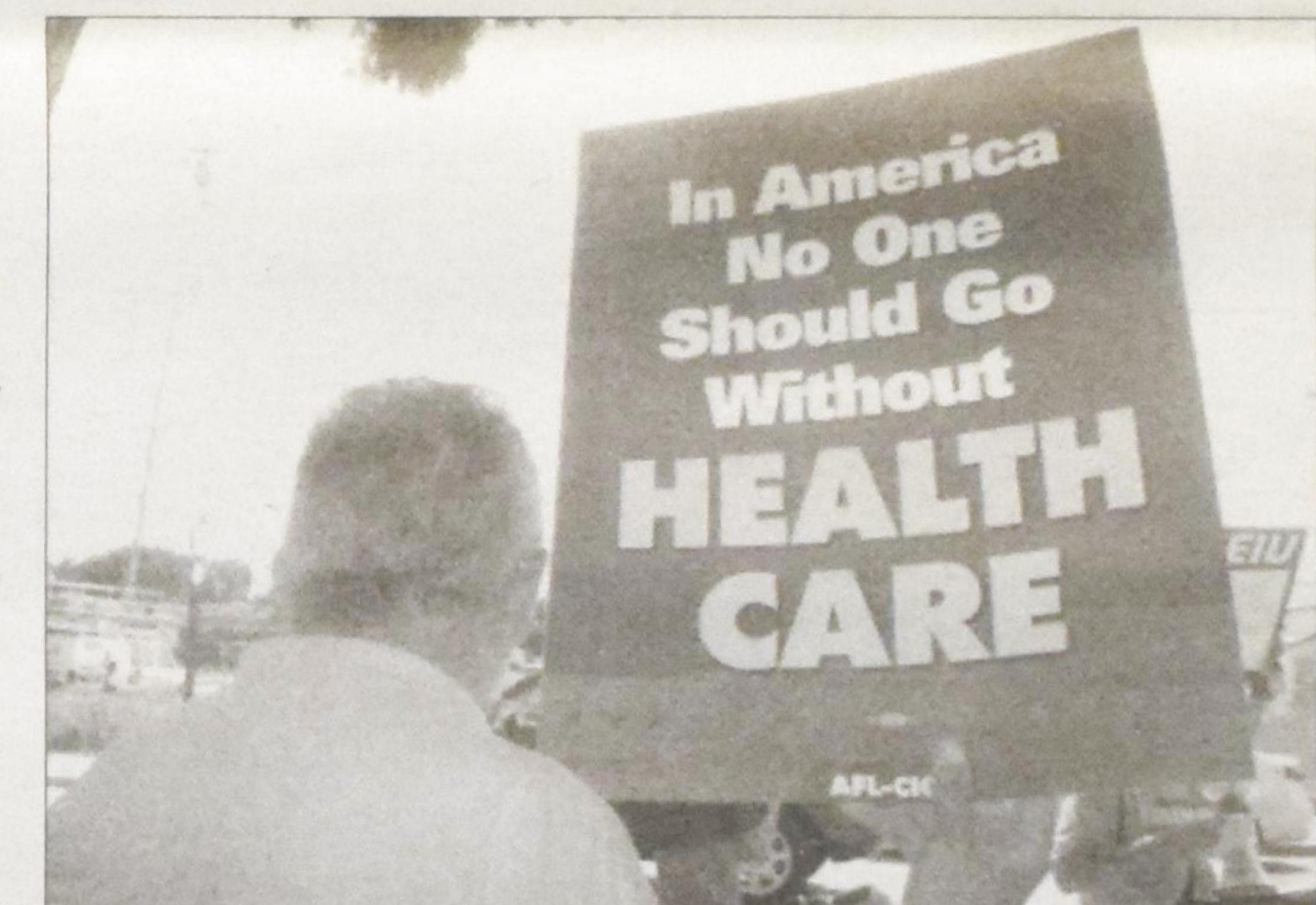
**Taking the long view**

One of the most striking things about the Obama presidency is the patience by which he governs. American politics has become ontologically impatient, having been stretched to the point of breaking too many times for the sake of the 24-hour news cycle. In such an environment, it’s nearly unthinkable to consider more than a few weeks’ or months’ concerns.

Obama governs differently.

During the past summer, Obama took a considerable beating from liberals over the debt ceiling debate, and was widely portrayed as kowtowing to a nihilistic Republican agenda. Obituaries for his re-election were hastily penned. Yet months later, Congress’s self-appointed debt-reduction committee came up empty-handed, and Republicans now face a choice between automatic deep cuts to their own favoured causes, or else agreeing to bipartisan budget negotiations with the president. Far from partisan subservience, Obama showed a cunning ability to plan out his victories months in advance.

The long-view approach also works as a tactic for accomplishing legislative goals without the need to stir up



*Obama’s healthcare reforms will extend coverage to many previously uninsured Americans.*

a hornet’s nest of partisan politicking. For example, rather than outright repealing the Defense of Marriage Act, which allows states to invalidate same-sex marriages, the Obama administration announced in 2011 that it would simply no longer defend the Act in court, likely dooming it to eventual extinction.

This kind of an agenda is predicated on an eight-year timeline. Although many voters hoped for a proactive, take-no-prisoners approach, what we got instead was a president who takes the long way home.

Ultimately, Obama’s record speaks for itself: He is an accomplished and balanced president who has neither capitulated to partisanship nor been held captive to the whims of the moment. He has shown he can effectively govern the United States of America, turning it from a weight under which the world groans back to a respected world leader.

Obama’s agenda remains unfinished; if voters choose in November to give him another four years, I’m hopeful for what is still to come.

*Christian Bell is a web designer for a non-profit organization and a graduate from Calvin Theological Seminary. He and his wife Beth live in Grand Rapids, Mich.*



## News

## From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

**Higgs boson – not the God Particle but God's particle**

 At the end of 2011 the scientists at CERN, the atomic research institute in Geneva, announced that two recent CERN experiments had shown evidence for the Higgs boson. Using the Large Hadron Collider (an underground tube on the Swiss-Franco border near Geneva), scientists were able to find signs of the Higgs boson with two separate detectors (one labelled ATLAS, the other CMS). While the individual evidence from either detector was not as strong yet as scientists would like, the collective evidence – the fact that both detectors identified similar energy ranges for this particle – suggests that the Higgs boson should be found in this mass region. Apparently, this range fits well with the predictions of the Standard Model of particle physics, and scientists hope to gain more definite proof of the Higgs boson in 2012.

The Higgs boson is a particle given off by the Higgs field. In the Standard Model of how particles interact, the Higgs field is what gives particles mass. Without the Higgs field there would be no mass for anything. Up to this point, the work on the Higgs field and boson is all theory: we have no solid evidence that this particle exists.

If the Higgs boson is confirmed, then physicists will be able to explain all the known particles and their interactions, as well as three of the four forces thought to explain much of our visible universe (the fourth force is gravity, which is left unexplained in the Standard Model). Finding the Higgs boson would cumulate several centuries of physics research. It would be a simple (to physicists, if not to the rest of us), elegant and beautiful way to understand a large part of the cosmos.

In fact the Higgs boson has been so central to current understandings of the structure of matter that it was titled the "God Particle" in Nobel laureate Leon Lederman and science writer Dick Teresi's popular science book *The God Particle: If the Universe is the Answer, What is the Question?* The

title was chosen because the Higgs boson was so important, elusive and expensive to find. As Christians, we know that if the Higgs boson exists, it is not a God particle, but it is certainly one of God's particles.

**Still many unknowns**

God's creation is wonderfully complex, and even if found the Higgs boson would simply open a new page in developing our understanding of the beauty of creation. There are still large unknowns which we need to understand (aside from the mystery of gravity). For example, according to our current understanding, normal matter is only part of the creation. Astronomers argue that the movement of the stars and galaxies suggests that there must be much more matter than is evident to telescopes. Physicists speak of dark matter that cannot be seen in the night sky and dark energy (of which I have no understanding), suggesting there are further theoretical advances to be made before we have unravelled the wonders of God's creation.

One aspect of the Higgs boson research that attracts me most is its grand scale. While in the past, scientific advances were often achieved by one or a few individuals, our understanding of God's creation and its subtleties has so advanced that the work of characterizing the Higgs boson using the ATLAS detector involved over 3000 scientists from 174 universities and laboratories coming from 38 nations. The CMS experiment involved similar numbers of individuals. And the gargantuan Large Hadron Collider (27 kilometres long!) demonstrates that the tools needed to make these advances have become not only physically large but also very expensive. Significant cooperation between individuals and nations is required to advance our understanding of God's creation. It is amazing what we can learn about God's creation when there is good will and scientists work together.

The Christian community could learn from this cooperation



This tunnel is part of the Large Hadron Collider, one of the research tools that makes the search for the Higgs boson possible.

among scientists. There is a reason that our Lord prays that we might remain one (John 17:21): the glory of Christ is said to be evident in the unity of his Bride, the church. The unity that God's particle, the Higgs boson, would give to our understanding of creation, as well as the unity of the scientists tasked with finding it, provide powerful models for the church that we should prayerfully seek to emulate. ➤

Rudy Eikelboom ([reikelboom@wlu.ca](mailto:reikelboom@wlu.ca)), who has (only?) rudimentary knowledge of physics, is a member of the Waterloo CRC and the Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

**Teens send Lego Man into 'space'**

David Clark Scott (Christian Science Monitor)

TORONTO – Okay, technically the Lego Man didn't get into space. But that doesn't make this \$400 science project by two Canadian teens any less cool.

Mathew Ho and Asad Muhammad, both 17 years old, sent a Lego Man – complete with miniature Canadian flag – 80,000 feet above the Earth. They captured the voyage on video using a weather balloon they bought online for \$85. Ho and Muhammad packed a Styrofoam box with some gel hand warmers to keep three point-and-shoot cameras and a video camera (bought used on Craigslist) functioning at the below -20 C temperatures. They also put a cellphone with GPS aboard to track it. And they stitched together a parachute (on Muhammad's mom's sewing machine) to bring their Legonaut and their cameras safely back to Earth.

The boys filled their weather balloon with \$165 worth of helium, bringing it close to the bursting point. Why so much?

"If you fill your balloon, say, halfway, it will reach a higher max altitude but then obviously it's got a lot more time in the air so it has a lot more time that it could be affected by wind," Ho explained to the *Toronto Star*.

"A perfect flight plan would be just up and down, on the same spot. The less we had to drive (to retrieve Lego Man) that was our goal, especially since we're surrounded by so many lakes. There were so many problems that could go wrong," said Ho.

Watch their video and you can see when the balloon bursts – at 24 kilometres above the earth (almost 80,000 feet). NASA says that an object isn't in "space" unless it



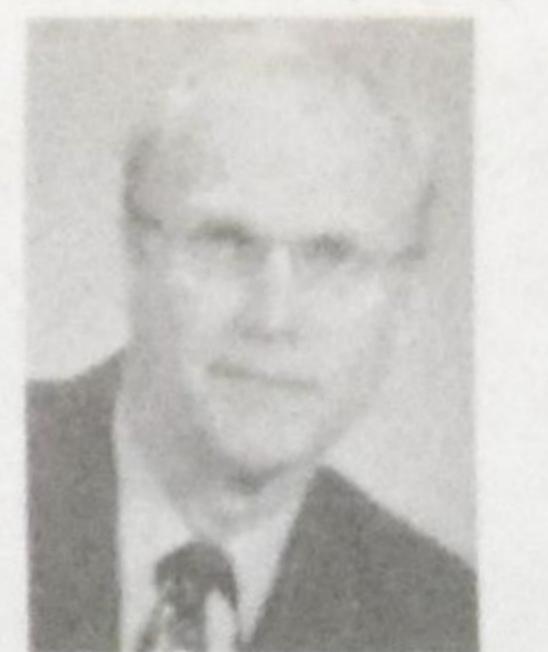
One of Ho and Muhammad's cameras captured this picture of their 'Legonaut' in space.

reaches about 50 kilometres above the Earth.

After the balloon reached its bursting point, the parachute brought the package of cameras, cellphone, and, of course Lego Man, safely back to the ground – about 122 kilometres from its launch at a soccer field in Newmarket, Ont. Prior to the launch, the boys used a University of Wyoming site that calculates weather balloon trajectories. And with the help of the GPS, they recovered the package after a hunt in the woods near Rice Lake.

Certainly Ho and Muhammad aren't the first to launch a video camera into the stratosphere. In fact, Ho said that they were inspired by Massachusetts Institute of Technology students who'd sent a video camera aloft on a weather balloon a couple of years ago.

Still, the MIT students didn't send a Lego Man up, up, and away. ➤



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## Editorial

# Peace is the opposite of security

Bert Witvoet

I read the book *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, and I stand amazed at this man's passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Eric Metaxas's biography, Bonhoeffer believed that "Christ must be brought into every square inch of the world and the culture, but one must be shining and bright and pure and robust." Wow, did this man read Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands during his theological studies? The language is thoroughly Reformational and the commitment to a disciplined life of cultural obedience is strong.

In August of 1934, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave a talk about true peace to an ecumenical assembly gathered at Fanø, Denmark. His view of what leads to peace blows me away. (I was two months old when he gave this speech, so I can be excused for not taking notice earlier). He said:

"There is no way to peace along the way of safety. For peace must be dared, it is itself the great venture and can never be safe. Peace is the opposite of security. To demand guarantees is to want to protect oneself completely. Peace means giving oneself completely to God's commandment, wanting no security, but in faith and obedience laying the destiny of the nations in the hand of the Almighty God, not trying to direct it for selfish purposes. Battles are won, not with weapons, but with God. They are won when the way leads to the cross."

The statement "peace is the opposite of security" strikes me as a lightning bolt of insight. But what a prescription for trouble! Bonhoeffer practiced what he preached, too. He left America, returning to his native Germany – which was already at war – prepared to die a martyr's death. He was executed by the Nazis two weeks before the end of the war. Bonhoeffer was one of these rare Christians who lived the radical message of the Sermon on the Mount – "Happy are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." To tell you the truth, his life and testimony make me feel uncomfortable. Is that what it takes to follow Jesus? I ask myself. Most of us prefer a pinch more security than offered by this strange version of godly peace.

## Unflinching obedience

There is another person who makes me feel uncomfortable: Jesus. He put aside all concerns for security and safety. He is worse in terms of putting me to shame than is Bonhoeffer, because Dietrich could at least do what he did in the strength of Jesus. Bonhoeffer was a martyr, no doubt about it. But was Jesus a martyr? Not really. He didn't die for the faith. He is the faith. He is the only human being who died because God demanded it. All the martyrs in history are guaranteed salvation. Jesus was guaranteed damnation. He had no one to rely on but himself. He felt forsaken even by God.

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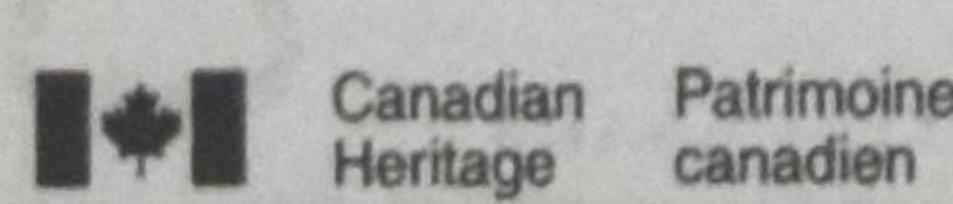
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Jesus was burdened with an even greater knowledge of the power of evil than was Bonhoeffer. A few days before he was arrested, he predicted his own death and its circumstances with uncanny precision: "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified." All the things that happened to him he foresaw with great clarity and detail.

## Because of wickedness

I could say, well, that is the burden Jesus took

upon himself, and he, after all, is the Son of God, but he doesn't expect someone like me to be that brave. Think again. While talking about the end times or the beginning of "birth pains" (such a nice euphemism, at least, from the point of view of a male who has never experienced Eve's curse) he says, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other.... Because of the wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

Ah yes, the love of most will grow cold. Why? Because of the wickedness in this world. In Bonhoeffer's time it was the wickedness of the Nazis that turned many a Christian into a coward. In Jesus' time it was the wickedness of the religious leaders. Peter's love grew cold when he denied Jesus three times. But later he and the other apostles bravely faced the wickedness of the Roman emperors. Whose wickedness threatens our security today? What causes our love to grow cold? What temperature is your and my love?

Or another question: Who is for peace, the peace that answers to the demands of God for this earth and its people?

## Victorious peace

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you," said Jesus. "I do not give to you as the world gives." What is that peace that Jesus talks about and that the world does not give us? Apparently it's the opposite of security. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble," warns Jesus. "But take heart! I have overcome the world." This apocalyptic language does not seem to fit the experience of Christians in a democratic, fairly tolerant country like Canada. North Korea, maybe. And Syria. But Canada? The land that upholds the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms? This matter requires some exploration and searching of hearts. Somehow the peace that Jesus talks about seems to lose some lustre because the faith trouble he predicts is not really showing up in our comfortable Western lives.

Seeking first the Kingdom of heaven is not supposed to be a nice, comfortable way of spending your time on this earth, because in that pursuit persecution and lack of security is the norm. Paul warned his apprentice Timothy that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12) Seems rather straightforward, doesn't it?

Of course, many of us face daunting challenges in spite of political and social stability. Maybe our challenge is fighting cancer, staying fit in a calorie-rich environment, fighting alcoholism or sexual addiction, or avoiding boredom by tweeting and exploring the Internet. Did I mention trying to solve a diabolical Sudoku? Hmm. I don't know. It seems a long way from the road that Jesus and Co. walked.

## A realistic perspective

I have come to the conclusion that not every time and place is equally dangerous for those who are faithful witnesses of Christ. Bonhoeffer put himself in great danger when he returned to a Germany that was ruled by a most ruthless anti-Christ. The Pharisees were equally anti-Christ but they didn't have Hitler's power to destroy. However, they were able to manipulate a secular power that could be equally ruthless and destructive towards Christ.

There are equally dangerous places for disciples of Christ in the world today, but they are not found in most Western countries. And so the words of Jesus and of Paul must be applied in a way that recognizes different levels of persecution. All the more reason for us to be found faithful in these times and places of lesser trouble. All the more reason for us not to shrink back when all the opposition we face is a word of ridicule or a loss of friendship.

We certainly should not think that our society is less hostile to the gospel, especially not when we refuse to limit its application to the private areas of life. Even today we should hear from the pulpits the words of Peter: "Save yourself from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40).

I also believe that when we are found to be faithful in these smaller ways, we can look forward to a comparatively greater reward, as we hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servants! You have been faithful with a few things [at a time when the wickedness around you was somewhat tame]; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!"

That master's happiness is the peace – the shalom – that passes all understanding. We can already taste it. It is first of all an inner peace that allows us to forego security concerns now. But it's also a cosmic reality that backs up this inner peace. That cosmic peace is what Jesus accomplished for us through his death and resurrection – the Kingdom both here and coming.

But you and I have to drop our security blanket if we want to see it. ↗

*Bert Witvoet did not go on an educational mission trip to South Africa this year and that may well have accounted for his sense that he is becoming too comfortable with his life of retirement, which includes feeding birds, reading books and writing reflective epistles. Although, he and his wife heroically brave the elements as they walk at seven in the morning to stay healthy. Does that count for something in the Kingdom?*

**Letters****Truth and reality**

Gerry Gerrits wants us to "distinguish between truth and reality when reading the Bible" (CC Jan. 23), and he uses the parables to show us what he means. So far so good.

However, the parables convey absolute truths. They were used to make these truths easier to understand, and everyone that was present knew and understood that this mode of teaching was being used. Gerrits goes on to question "Can the creation account as found in Genesis be looked at in the same manner?" My answer is yes we can, as long as we distinguish between parable, metaphor, flowery and poetic language, and straightforward reporting of events, laws, promises and the like.

Can we do that? Absolutely, the Jews at the time when the Lord Jesus was using parables did not have a problem with this. So why should we? The whole controversy revolves around our willingness to distinguish between metaphor and reality, and serious study of the scriptures will give us the right insight.

Gerrits also reminds us of what happened in the Netherlands in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* in 1924. At that time the Rev. Dr. J.G. Geelkerken questioned whether the serpent actually spoke to Eve. The question is somewhat childish, because the Scriptures clearly say – not in the form of a metaphor – that a member from the animal world, used by the devil, spoke to Eve, just as the donkey did when that animal spoke to the prophet Balaam (Numbers 22). What kind of animal was it that spoke to Eve? Was it nice looking, did it have legs? Who cares. The only thing that we do know is that it spoke.

Gerrits wonders why we do not use the same criteria for all of scripture, but I think he is mistaken in his understanding of the situation before the flood. Let me explain. Before the flood we see two kinds of people, followers of God, and people opposed to God. Just like it is now. The opposers are called the sons of man, and the followers the sons of God. The sons of God get intertwined with the daughters of man, and the result is the world wide flood, so this has nothing to do with Greek mythology.

Finally, Gerrits seems to worry about errors that may have crept into the scriptures, and indeed that may be the case in some numbers, genealogies and the like. However, at no time or at any place is the main general message of the Bible affected whatsoever. Just look at the number of prophecies contained in the Bible, hundreds of them, and they all came to pass, as predicted, except for those that have yet to be fulfilled. There are people, even leaders in our Christian community, that think that sin in the life of a human being is a residue of his or her animal ancestry. Lord help us.

W. Van Oene  
St. Thomas, Ont.



Heron River

a novel

Hugh Cook

**Heron River**

In the February 13th issue of *Christian Courier*, we neglected to include information about where to purchase Hugh Cook's new book, *Heron River*. The novel can be ordered from Mosaic Press's online bookstore at [mosaicpress.com](http://mosaicpress.com) or from any Chapters/Indigo bookstore. It's also available at the Redeemer University College Bookstore.

**What's your story?*****Christian Courier* Short Story Contest!**

**I:** Send in your original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by May 1, 2012. First prize receives \$100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Please note that this contest is for *short stories*, not essays or articles. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to [cathy@christiancourier.ca](mailto:cathy@christiancourier.ca). Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

**II:** Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. There will be two divisions: junior (Grades 3-5) and Intermediate (Grades 6-8). Send your short stories (500 - 1000 words) to [cathy@christiancourier.ca](mailto:cathy@christiancourier.ca) before May 1, 2012. **Entries over the word limit will not be considered.** The first-place winner in each division will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at \$50. All stories will be considered for publication in CC.

**Reformed tradition**

Thank you for taking stock of the Reformed tradition today (CC Jan. 23). I find John Bolt's answer puzzling. He suggests that relief efforts are not very important because they merely try to make the world a better place. Instead, Christians should aim to get to heaven.

The Reformed, as Syd Hielema notes, define heaven as restoration of the creation. Perhaps Bolt means to warn that we shouldn't place our ultimate trust in our own abilities and programs. Such a warning is always appropriate, but to draw a distinction between efforts to get to heaven and efforts to improve the lot of the disadvantaged is precisely what the Reformed tradition I know would choke on.

Nick Loenen  
Richmond B.C.

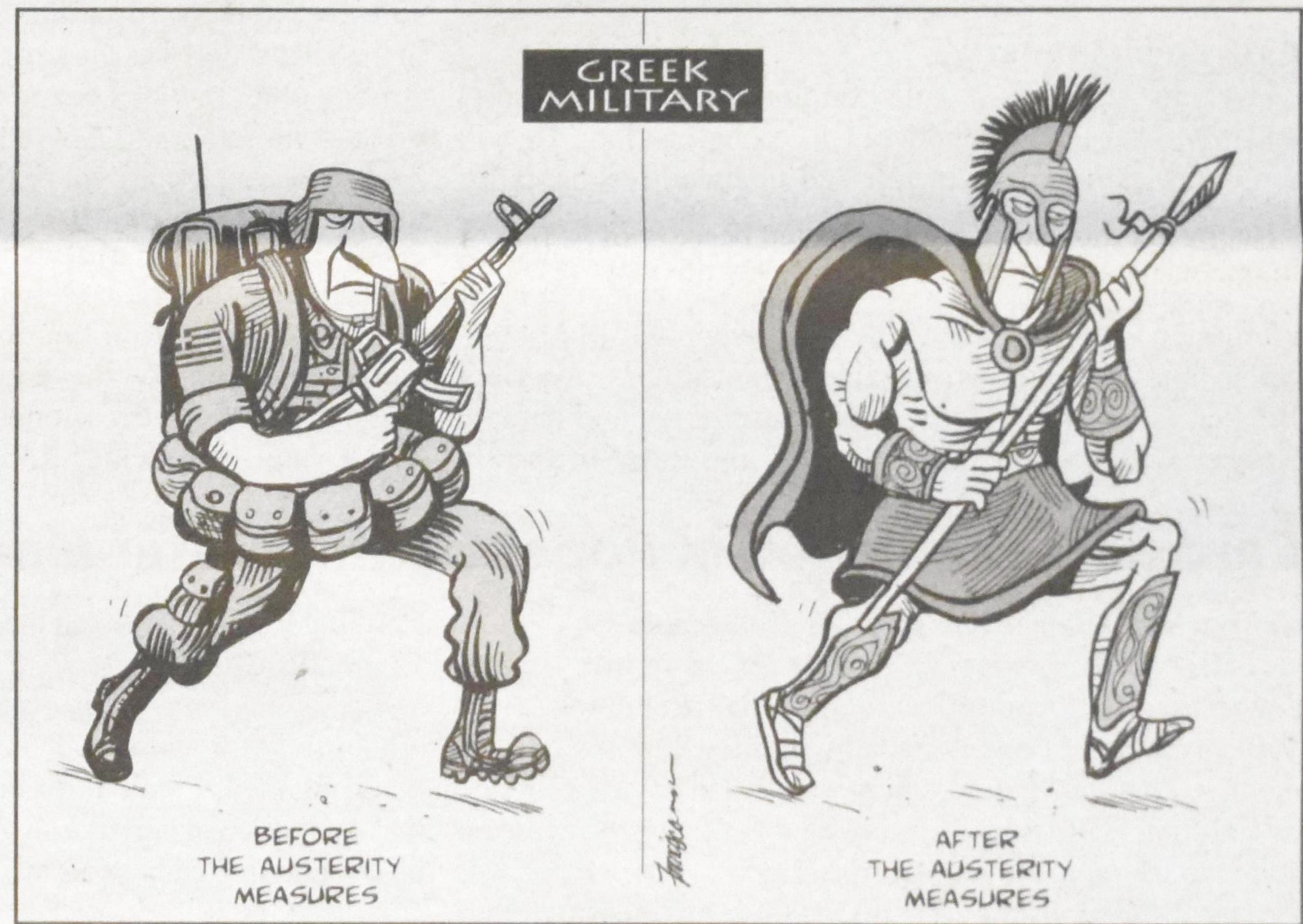
**Keep up the good work**

It was nice of *Christian Courier* to engage the thoughts of several well-educated, intellectual people to solve the most important issue currently facing the Reformed tradition (Jan. 23). Of course you could have asked me, an ordinary farmer, to answer that same question since the answer is rather simple. The most important issue currently facing the Reformed tradition is that not enough people read the *Christian Courier*! Keep up the great work!

Bill Los  
Listowel, Ont.

In the Jan. 23 issue you had some help from across the border, but your regular Canadian authors and editors constitute a marvellous (as they call it) stable of writers. Consistently good stuff! Appreciation from across the border!

Hary Boonstra  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

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## News

## Kabetu named new head of Christian Reformed World Missions in Canada

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Steve Kabetu is the newly named director for Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) in Canada. From 2006 to his appointment to CRWM Kabetu worked in the Canadian CRC office of Race Relations.



Kabetu was born in Kenya on a land reserve where members of his family had been transplanted in the 1950s by British colonial authorities. The British notion of “civilizing” the Africans on the land reserves disregarded the reality that his family and other indigenous Africans already came from well-ordered, centuries-old societies, says Kabetu. Being moved onto reserves played a role in breaking apart their traditions, customs and sense of history.

A third-generation Christian, Kabetu did not himself spend his childhood on the reserve. But the perspective he brings to his new position at CRWM, which he calls “post-colonial,” comes in part from having been born there, he says.

Along with his friend and former pastor Rev. Fred Witteveen, Kabetu has worked to break down barriers that block people from building relationships with those of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Kabetu met Witteveen many years ago, as Witteveen was planting his first church in Toronto.

### Crossing boundaries

Kabetu will work in collaboration with other agencies and ministries for the benefit of CRC congregations. He will direct the gathering of prayer and financial resources for the ministry and maintain compliance with Canadian law and regulations relating to the work of mission agencies.

“I believe that Steve will be a very able communicator of mission vision and a motivator for response to our Lord’s call to mission as well as a capable administrator,” says Gary Bekker, CRWM’s director in North America and abroad. Bekker says Kabetu’s experiences, and those of family

members before him, have taught him how important it is that missionaries “cross geographic, cultural and linguistic boundaries to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ.”

Kabetu tells the story of his grandfather, Stephano, who at the turn of the 20th century lived in one of the villages in what would later be Kenya. Living in that same village was the missionary Cannon Harry Leakey and his family. The Leakeys learned the traditions, customs and language of the indigenous people, which helped them to teach Stephano Kabetu and others about Jesus and biblical faith.

As the Leakeys got to know the Kabetu family in the early 1900s, the missionary family realized that one of their younger sons, Kinuthia (later baptized Stephano), had the ability to learn languages. And he had a great curiosity to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Cannon Leakey eventually asked for permission to send Stephano abroad to study. Agreeing to go, Stephano became one of the first Kenyans to travel to Great Britain to study English and British culture.

When he returned to Kenya, Kabetu’s grandfather became involved in the village church and, with help from his brother Matthew Njoroge Kabetu, assisted Cannon Leakey in the years-long effort of translating the Bible from English into the indigenous language of their people.

Also influencing him, says Kabetu, was a book written in 1937 by anthropologist Louis Seymour Leakey, who grew up in the village and was the son of missionary Cannon Leakey. Among other things, Leakey told the life story of Kabetu’s great-grandfather, an African elder who lived in the 19th century before the arrival of the British. The book recounts the ups and downs of life back then, as well as describes in detail the customs, traditions, political and social structures, and the environment in which his great-grandfather lived.

“It was clear from the documented accounts of their stories that communities had thrived for many centuries, while enduring the occasional vagaries of war and famine,” said Kabetu. Meanwhile, Kabetu’s father, Leonard Njoroge

Kabetu, was a steady and loving influence on his life. Educated in India, his father worked for many years for the Kenyan government.

### ‘Widening the circle’

Like his grandfather and father before him, Kabetu also studied abroad. He moved to Canada to study economics and environmental studies at York University in Toronto. It was during this time that he met and became close friends with Witteveen, at the time a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary who was in the process of planting a new church in the ethnically diverse neighborhood around York where Kabetu and his wife, Patricia, lived.

“Fred Witteveen accompanied me on my journey and we talked often about how we could work to bring about justice and reconciliation to our communities,” said Kabetu. Through that friendship, Kabetu became more involved in their Christian Reformed congregation. In that ministry setting they harnessed their mutual desire to promote justice and reconciliation, and helped to create the first Canadian CRC racial reconciliation program called “Widening the Circle.”

Years later, they both helped to develop the “Dance of Racial Reconciliation,” the program now used by the CRC’s Race Relations office in the United States.

Inspired by Scripture and motivated by a passion for justice and reconciliation, Kabetu has moved from the Canadian office of Race Relations to CRWM. Witteveen is now involved in development and conflict-mitigation efforts in Kenya, where he is country team leader for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC).

As the face and voice of CRWM in Canada, Kabetu says he plans to engage CRC congregations and others about the important role missionaries play, and the impact of the gospel in bringing transformation around the world. By crossing into other cultures, missionaries bring the good news of the gospel, including healing and reconciliation to communities that have undergone historical hurts, says Kabetu. ▶

## Cardinal’s prediction of Pope’s death creates alarm, backpeddling

Marian Van Til, with files from *The Telegraph*

THE VATICAN – *The Telegraph*, a major British newspaper, has reported a “sensational prediction” by a Vatican cardinal: Pope Benedict will die within the next 12 months. That startling statement was said to have been made by Cardinal Paolo Romeo, Archbishop of Palermo, while on a visit to China in November of last year.

*The Telegraph* reported that Italian businessmen and Chinese representatives of the Catholic Church who accompanied Romero in China said he seemed “so sure of the fact” that they “were convinced that he was talking about an assassination attempt. They were so alarmed by his remarks that they reported them back to the Vatican.”

Because of the nature of the cardinal’s comments, a “top secret report” dated Dec. 30, 2011, was delivered to the Pope himself last month by another cardinal, Dario Castrillon Hoyos.

The report was in German, Benedict’s native language, apparently to keep it from being understood and disseminated by people around the pope who read and speak primarily Italian. It warned of a “Mordkomplott” against Pope Benedict – a murder plot. Pope Benedict and his closest advisers took it seriously and are said to have initiated an investigation.

Despite the attempts to be discreet the story did break in the Italian media, but not until February 3. The Italian daily *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, which has a reputation for “scoops,” led with the headline “Plot against the Pope – he will die within 12 months.” The paper published a page from the confidential report.

*Il Fatto Quotidiano* reported, “During his talks in China,

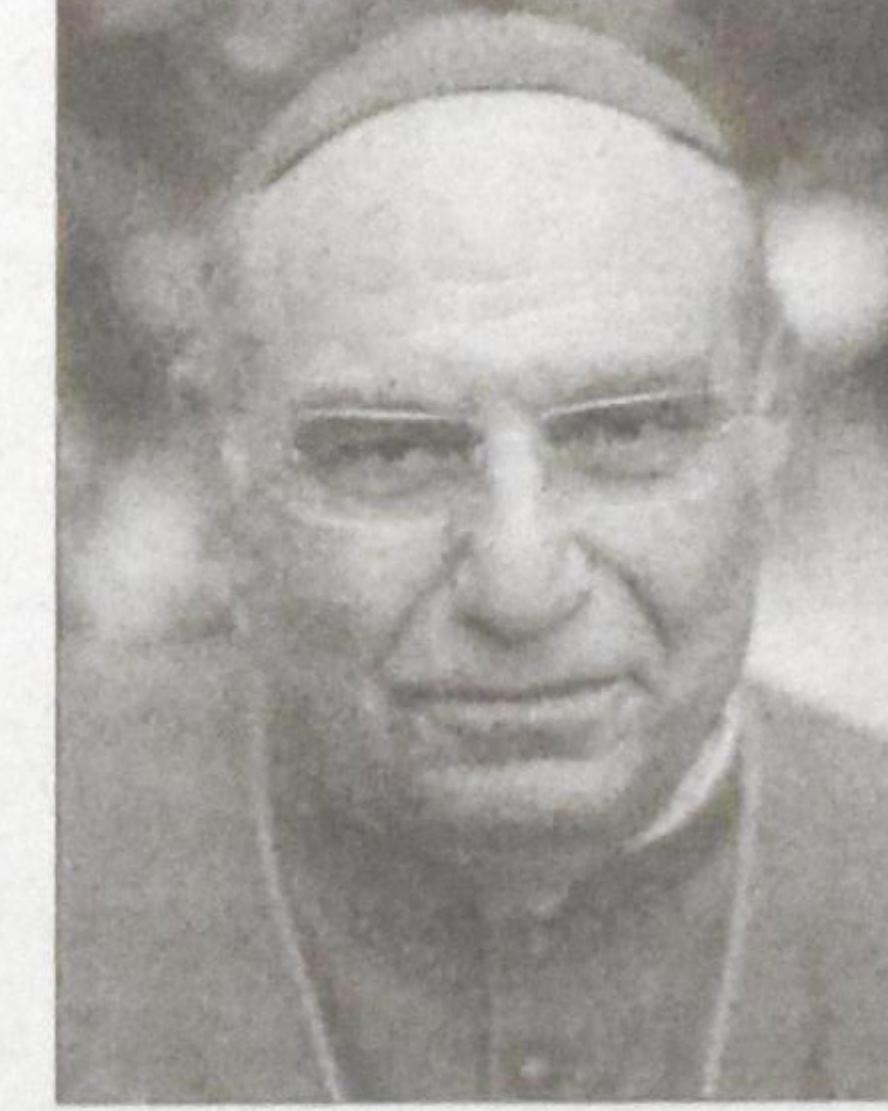
Cardinal Romeo predicted the death of Benedict XVI within 12 months. His remarks were expressed with such certainty and resolution that the people he was speaking to thought, with a sense of alarm, that an attack on the Pope’s life was being planned. Cardinal Romeo could never have imagined that the indiscreet remarks he made on the trip to China would be communicated back to the Vatican by third parties.”

### ‘I never said that’

After the story broke in Italy, Cardinal Romeo insisted that he never said any such thing, and that the prediction attributed to him was “absolutely without basis.” The Italian news agency ANSA quoted him as saying, “It is so outside of reality that it should not be given any consideration.”

Even The Vatican itself would not own up to the report, or to having received information from sources in China. Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi told the Italian press, “It is so incredible that we cannot comment on it.” He repeated, “It seems to me something that is so far from reality that I don’t even want to address it.” And he repeated again, “It seems an incredible story and I don’t want to comment.” He did not, however, deny the existence of the German-language report. But he called it “devoid of reality.”

According to the sources who reported back to The Vatican on what Romeo said, the cardinal actually named Pope Benedict’s likely successor, indicating that after



two foreign popes the office would revert to an Italian: Archbishop of Milan Cardinal Angelo Scola.

Before last year, Cardinal Scola was the Patriarch of Venice but was promoted to the archbishopric of Milan by Benedict in June 2011. According to Romeo, Benedict views Cardinal Scola as his ideal successor because they have similar personalities and theological outlooks.

The Italian media and *The Telegraph* also reported some gossipy tidbits that Cardinal Romeo was said to have revealed while in China. He spoke of power struggles within The Vatican and was said to have insisted that Pope Benedict “cannot stand” his Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone. Bertone is the Vatican’s second most senior figure.

*The Telegraph* reported that Vatican experts are saying that the release of the report could be part of a power struggle within the Vatican administration to try to force Bertone to leave.

*The Telegraph* noted that the most recent attempt on a pope’s life was in 1981 “when John Paul II was shot and critically wounded in St Peter’s Square by Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turkish gunman with links to a shadowy militant group called the Grey Wolves.” Some sources say that that assassination attempt was backed by the Soviet KGB and Bulgarian Secret Service in retaliation for John Paul II’s denouncing of communism and his support for the pro-democracy Solidarity movement in his native Poland.

Before John Paul II was chosen as pope, Pope John Paul I died unexpectedly and under strange circumstances in 1978 after only 33 days in office. There are various theories about that death having been a murder, but no conclusive proof. ▶

## News

**U.S.: Contraception mandate sparks major religious liberty fight**

Marian Van Til, with files from CT, CCO, USCCB, CNA

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A heated controversy that began last month over a contraception “mandate” in the new U.S. healthcare law is escalating, even though President Obama issued a “compromise” on Feb. 10 in response to intense criticism from a variety of people of faith. The White House sees its compromise as an appropriate “accommodation” to those who feel the mandate tramples their freedom of conscience and religion. But those effected by the mandate say the “accommodation” is anything but.

What is the issue? The White House announced that a mandate in the still-being-implemented healthcare law (“Obamacare”) will require that employer-provided health insurance policies supply free “preventive services” which include contraception in all forms to any employee who wants it: birth control pills, abortion-inducing drugs or sterilization. The mandate allows exemptions for churches and their employees but not for faith-based hospitals, universities or other organizations and agencies whose employees are not solely members of that particular faith.

So, for example, Catholic hospitals, universities or social service agencies which operate in line with Catholic teaching opposing both abortion and contraception would be forced, nevertheless, to provide their employees with those services (abortion in the form of abortifacients). If they refuse they would be breaking the law and suffer the consequences. Their other alternative would be to stop providing health insurance for their employees.

After a week of heated opposition nationwide – resistance apparently unexpected by Obama, despite warnings from Vice President Biden (a Catholic) and several others in the administration – the President and Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius offered an “accommodation.” The change says that if the institutions in question have religious objections to the mandate, then the insurance companies involved must pay for the services and provide them free of charge to women who request them.

Critics note that that doesn’t solve the problem. For one thing, many large Catholic and other religious institutions act as their own insurers. Nor are independent insurance companies going to provide something for nothing. The cost will be passed on to those institutions, who will still be forced to pay for the birth control, but in a slightly less direct manner.

Though several nominally Catholic organizations praised the compromise (and liberal Protestant groups didn’t oppose it in the first place), most were not appeased. After protesting the initial mandate, a few hours after President Obama announced the revision at a specially called press conference, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops publicly announced that the revised plan “continues to involve needless government intrusion in the internal governance of religious institutions, and to threaten government coercion of religious people and groups to violate their most deeply held convictions.”

**‘We can’t afford to be fooled again’**

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput asserted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that the rule remains “insulting” and “dangerous” to believers’ rights. “The HHS mandate, including its latest variant, is belligerent, unnecessary and deeply offensive to the content of Catholic belief. Any such mandate would make it morally compromising for us to provide health care benefits to the staffing of our public service ministries. We cannot afford to be fooled – yet again – by evasive and misleading allusions to the administration’s alleged ‘flexibility’ on such issues. The HHS mandate needs to be rescinded.” Chaput’s reference to “fooled yet again” refers to the bishops’ earlier support of the healthcare law after being assured repeatedly by the White House that the law would allow freedom of choice and contain no government subsidizing of abortion, both

of which are untrue.

Chaput and others have noted that “pregnancy is not a disease,” and engaging in sexual relations is a choice that others should not have to subsidize. Thus providing contraceptives shouldn’t be a mandatory “preventive health” service. Birth control is also inexpensive and currently available everywhere without insurance to anyone who wants it.

While not exclusively a liberal versus conservative fight, the issue is pitting women’s rights and pro-abortion advocates (a core constituency of Obama’s) against Catholics, many other Christians and orthodox Jews and Muslims who assert that their freedom of conscience and religion is being trampled on by the federal government. Archbishop and cardinal designate Timothy Dolan of New York said flatly, “We will not obey.” The slightly revised mandate hasn’t made him change his mind.

**‘First they came for Catholics...’**

Reformed evangelical Charles Colson says his extensive Prison Fellowship ministry is also effected, as are many other non-Catholic Christian groups and organizations run by people of faith who object to contraception and/or abortion. Catholic League President Bill Donohue predicted a reaction that is already happening: that President Obama would soon see Catholics “team with Protestants, Jews, Mormons and others to recapture their First Amendment rights.”

Charles Colson, Catholic Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., and Orthodox Rabbi Meir Soloveichik of New York City wrote a joint editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* on Feb. 10 outlining their objections. They began, “Stories involving a Catholic, a Protestant and a Jew typically end with a punch line. We wish that were the case here, but what brings us together is no laughing matter: the threat now posed by government policy to that basic human freedom, religious liberty.” The three men said the new rule “stands the First Amendment on its head. Nor was that changed by the accommodation.” (The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, part of the Bill of Rights, grants freedom of religion and its “free exercise,” and also freedom of speech and the press.)

The ecumenical three continued, “Coverage of this story has almost invariably been framed as a conflict between the federal government and the Catholic bishops. Nothing could be further from the truth. Under no circumstances should people of faith violate their consciences and discard their most cherished religious beliefs in order to comply with a gravely unjust law. That’s something that this Catholic, this Protestant and this Jew are in perfect agreement about.”

A few days earlier, Colson co-wrote a *Christianity Today* editorial with Timothy George, well-known dean of the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. Colson and George stressed evangelicals’ duty to unite with Catholics against the mandate. In a piece called “First They Came for the Catholics,” the two said evangelical Christians “must stand unequivocally with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. Because when the government violates the religious liberty of one group, it threatens the religious liberty of all.”

The issue is mushrooming into what some critics say may be the most serious religious liberty issue the U.S. has seen since the adoption of the First Amendment on Dec. 15, 1791. And the end is not yet in sight. ▶



Charles Colson



Cardinal Wuerl



Rabbi Soloveichik

**Britain: Don’t punish Christians for expressing faith, says bishop**

PETERBOROUGH, UK (TCI) — Christians should not be punished for open displays of their faith, a Church of England bishop has said. The Rt. Rev. Donald Allister, the Bishop of Peterborough, made the comments as he backed a motion supporting the right of Christians to live out their faith publicly.

Over 100 members of the Church of England General Synod have given their backing to the motion, along with three bishops, according to *The Sunday Telegraph*.

The comments came as a quartet of religious liberty cases involving Christians were set to appear before the European Court of Human Rights. Two of the cases involve Christians who want to wear a cross at work. The government has decided not to support the Christians, instead backing previous rulings from British courts prohibiting the cross-wearing.

Bishop of Peterborough Donald Allister said that while wearing a cross “isn’t a compulsory part of Christianity,” it is important for believers to “be public about their faith as well as private.” He added, “I hope the General Synod will affirm that because it’s saying to those judges, ‘It is not quite as simple as you think. Christianity isn’t to be privatized and shut away behind closed doors for consenting adults – it’s public.’”

The motion calls on the Church of England national assembly to declare that Christians should manifest their faith “in public life as well as in private, giving expression to our beliefs in the written and spoken word, and in practical acts of service to the local community and to the nation.”

Rev. Stephen Trott, who drew up the motion, warned about the aftershocks of prohibiting displays of the cross or attempts to ban prayers at public occasions (as the High Court recently did in ruling against prayers at local council meetings – which date back to the time of Elizabeth I). “It may well ultimately lead to the effective privatization of religion, in which it can only be manifested in one’s own home – or worse, only within one’s own private thoughts,” Trott said.

Trott also criticized some “ludicrous examples” of Christian marginalization, “such as the reluctance of some retailers to stock Christmas cards or Easter eggs with explicitly Christian themes.” ▶

**Baptist funeral turns bizarre**

Marian Van Til, with files from KSAZ

PHOENIX, Arizona — A funeral being held earlier this month for a man at St. John’s Institutional Baptist Church in Phoenix suddenly turned into a fight.

Before his death the man had apparently been feuding with an acquaintance. A friend of the deceased saw the acquaintance at the funeral, went over to him and punched him “in honour of the fallen,” said the friend.

Inexplicably, other mourners got caught up in the fight, which eventually involved nearly 30 people. The police were called. They broke up the fight but there were no arrests or serious injuries. Neither the person who instigated the fight nor the man he punched wanted to be identified.

The news of the brouhaha traveled fast. Phoenix TV station KSAZ was told by an attendee, “I don’t know... everybody was just running and fighting and it was just crazy.” Another mourner said, “Sad that it has to be at a funeral. Real sad.”

It turned out that the deceased was not your average Baptist. His death was as strange as the goings-on at his funeral. Moses Taylor, 20, was killed after breaking into an apartment and being hit in the face with a clothes iron by the man who lived there.

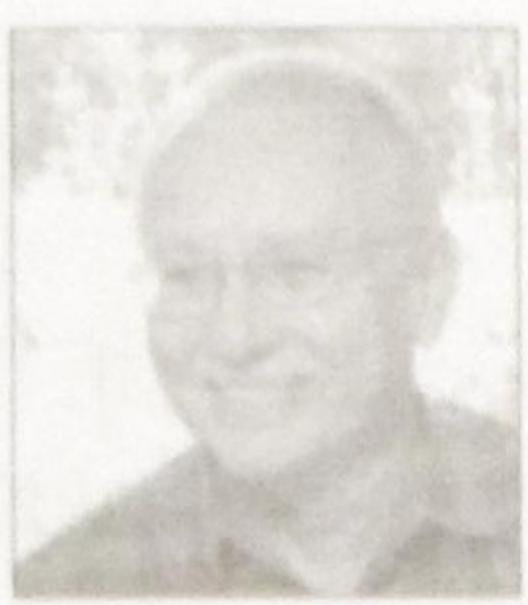
Lt. Sean Connolly of the Phoenix police told KSAZ, “Funerals are emotional for people, and we understand that. But there is some dignity that needs to be had.”

There was no word on how the minister trying to conduct the funeral reacted. Or about whether Moses Taylor was actually a member of the church. ▶

## Columns

## Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



Mrs. Busch asked me to do a very strange thing: she asked me to say *grace*. Our family was on a trip from Wisconsin to the East Coast of the United States, and we had stopped in at an old family friend's home in nearby New Jersey.

It was at breakfast that I received the request. The table was set and she said, "Curt, will you say *grace*, please?" I knew something was up: clearly Mrs. Busch knew how to pronounce the word. Why should I say it again? I glanced at my mom and she mouthed the words, "she means *pray*." And so I stumbled through an eight-year-old's prayer, hoping the words were okay for breakfast in a preacher's house.

## Let's open

I don't know when I first encountered it, but there it was: the phrase, "Let's open." Strange, because I knew these people were Christian and usually we prayed before we opened the casserole dishes and passed them around. A millisecond after wondering, I glanced around and everyone had bowed their heads. Ah, "open" means *silent prayer*. I knew about that. I began thinking thoughts in my head and managed to "say" a thank you for the food, and then something about the missionaries at home and abroad, and then ... I simply ran out of things to say. I sneaked a peek. Some were finished praying if open eyes meant anything; but others were still at prayer and I marvelled at how much head movement and closed-eye rolling staid Calvinists could manage without falling prey to enthusiasm.

Now that I am older, I can pray aloud in public extemporaneously without suffering too much nervousness, although "taking prayer requests" when I'm leading in worship can still be nerve-wracking at times ("Please pray for my neighbour whose pit bull had to be put down because it tore up a child's arm and now the neighbour is very sad." "Please pray for safety for my son and his friends who are returning from Ontario and ... well, they drive pretty fast.")

## An awkward situation

When still a teenager, I visited a girlfriend's house for a mealtime visit. We finished off a couple pre-feast martinis, and were ready to attack the roast – dead or alive – when Jane (not her real name) looked at her mother who looked at her father who intoned, "Well, my young preacher-man, you may say grace." By this time I knew what "say grace" meant, but it was quite uncomfortable praying for people who knew what churches were ("we pass some everyday in Elmhurst") but were not practising Christians.

They were accommodating me, I guess. Trying not to offend the "preacher-man" was certainly considerate, but I felt like the prayer could hardly help but be formal, a dead ceremony. Unless, of course, I prayed, "And help Jane's mom and dad to believe in you so they will not perish or suffer eternal punishment." (There were several reasons why I declined to offer such a prayer, the deadening effect on romance being one of them.) And there was also the matter of two martinis on an empty stomach, giving me some guilty thoughts about leading in prayer.

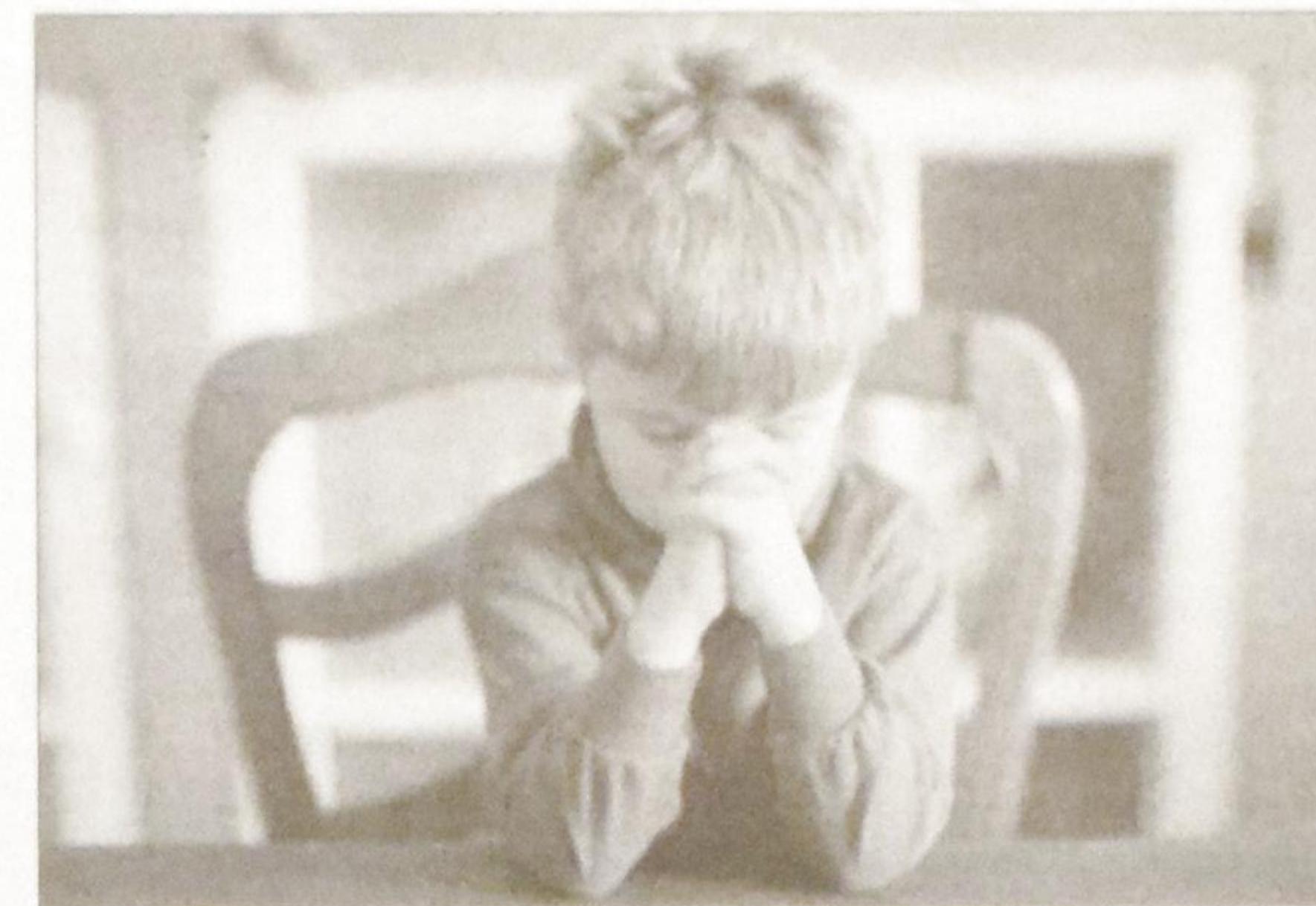
## Inclusive public prayer

I still experience a vague unease and nervousness whenever I am asked to pray in a "public" group that wouldn't normally ask a blessing. I appreciate the sensitivity of people who ask me to pray because they know that I am "religious," or a church-goer, or a Christian. But I feel awkward praying any prayer unless it has some contact with the others at the table.

"For what we are to receive we give thanks" is too impersonal. I want to address God, and to mention the Saviour. I have been thinking about this topic for several years and this Christmas I prepared a written prayer, knowing I would be asked to ask a blessing among people who normally wouldn't do so. This latest prayer, which we said on Dec. 27, 2011, forced no one at the table to say words they didn't mean. But it did address God, and the name of Christ.

At the same time, it allowed the option of everyone – agnostic or atheist, church-goer or anti-“religious” person – to participate when they felt they could do so. I handed out the prayer and let everyone scan it, and then Betsey and I read the prayer. We **bold-printed** parts that we thought the other guests might wish to recite with us.

## Praying in public



Confusing for a young child: being asked to "say grace" is actually a request to pray.

Here it is:

Dear Father and Creator of All,  
We thank you for the world you made,  
And for being present in our world.

At Christmas we thank you for becoming a human being

For showing your care for the world through your presence.  
We ask for your presence in the lives of those who are sick,  
especially Marion [a near neighbour].

We ask your blessing on those we love who are not here:

[say or think their names].

And today we thank you [join in as you feel led]:

For this food,

For farmers and gardeners,

For truckers and mechanics,

For merchants, clerks and bookkeepers,

For those who cook,

For who keep our homes bright and warm and clean.

Accept our thanks for all these things and many more  
in the name of Jesus Christ, the man for others. Amen. ☩

Curt Gesch is a retired school teacher from Quick, B.C.  
His new email address is cgesch63@gmail.com.

## Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



Emily Wierenga



## Loving when it hurts

**What is it that's keeping me from shouting "yes" at the top of my lungs?**  
**What is it that's keeping me from unlocking my doors?**

Four boys under the age of four. Will this act of ministry end up hurting my own children? Will this sacrifice turn them into infant martyrs and put them on a therapist's couch? Or will it turn them into compassionate, tender-hearted individuals who show God to the world?

There's no way of knowing. There's only faith.

Even as I am weeping and praying and wondering, I receive this email from a relative who has no idea about the questions I am asking: "I thank God for you, for all of the gifts that He has given you (and there are so many!) and how you are so willing to share a huge part of your heart in serving others. As 1 Peter 4:10 says: 'Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.' Your gifts are useful and needed. God bless you in your life, Em, and may you find joy and contentment, realizing that *contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want, but the realization of how much you already have.*"

How much I already have: a home, a husband who adores me and his children, a job I love, a woodstove that burns heat and a fridge full of food. What is it that's keeping me from shouting "yes" at the top of my lungs? What is it that's keeping me from unlocking my doors?

It is better to give than to receive, and God loves a cheerful giver. We are to be living sacrifices. I find nothing in the Bible about holding on. It's all about letting go. And so my husband and I shudder together in the quiet-hour, making prayer like some people make love, begging God for things unseen, that "they'll know we are Christians by our love." This submission, me before him, him before God, us before child, is the making of holy people.

(Thy kingdom come, thy will be done....) ☩

Because as the song goes, "love hurts." And in spite of all of my saying "I love you," much of me is a clanging gong. I'm afraid to get my feet dirty. I'm afraid to love someone who won't love me in return. I'm afraid of being found a fake.

And I'm looking at my six-month-old in his jolly jumper and my two-year-old in his fleecy pants. Both are so kind and familiar, and my friend's boys are all rough and strange. Will the rough ruin the kind? Or will the kind soften the rough?

How can we be the bigger kind of family, the kind that draws no lines in the sand? I weep for wanting to be that kind of mother, but not wanting the pain of transformation, the change that will open me wide in day-to-day labour so future generations might experience redemption.

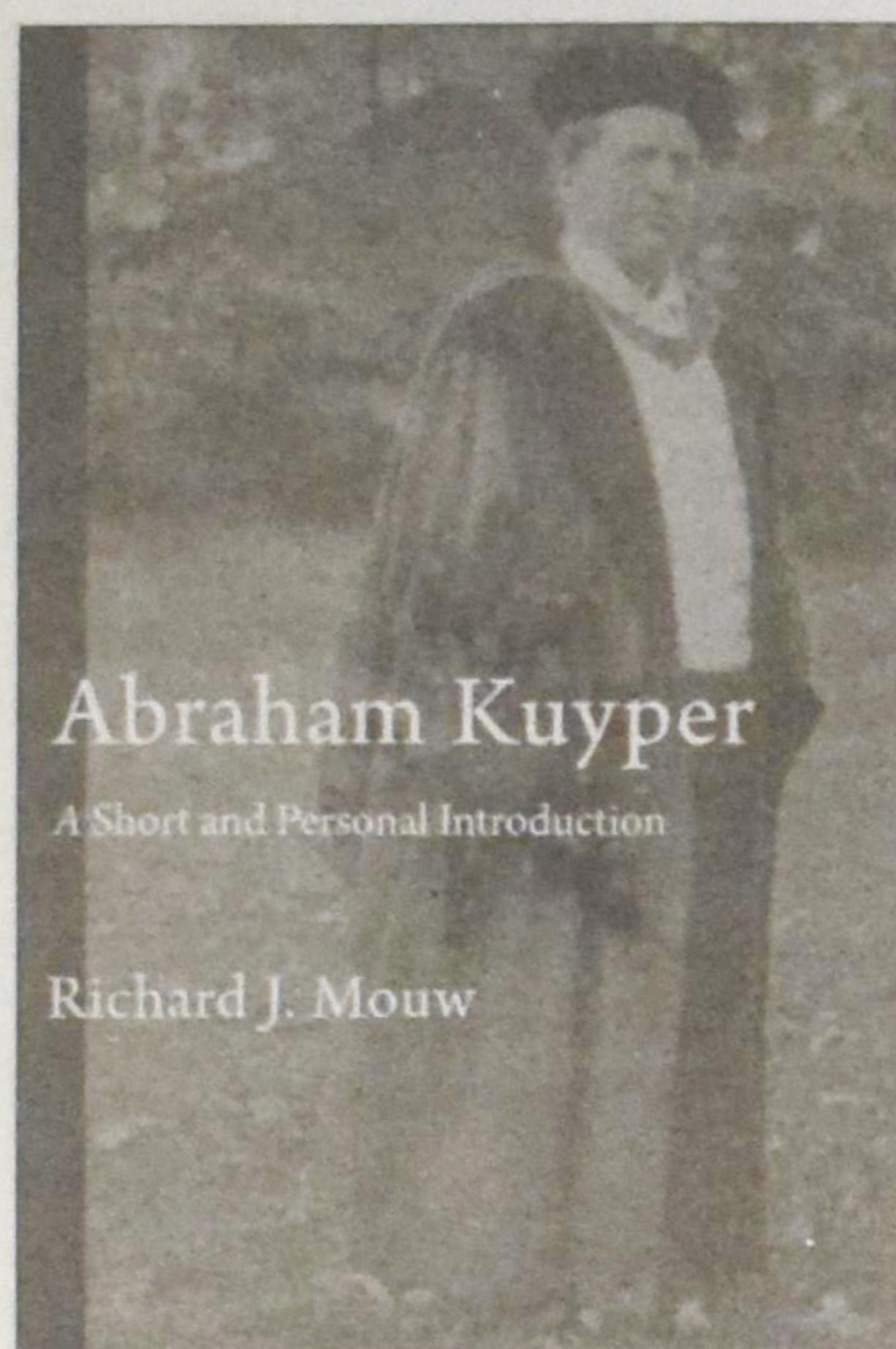
I feel angry at God for asking this of me.

their two boys (ages six months and two years, two months) will be welcoming two more boys, ages 17 months and four, into the folds of their home for the next month, and possibly longer. Please pray for them.

Emily Wierenga and her husband Trent, along with

## Reviews

### Book presents a more approachable Kuyper



**Abraham Kuyper**

A Short and Personal Introduction

Richard J. Mouw

#### Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction

by Richard J. Mouw

Grand Rapids:

William B. Eerdmans, 2011

patterns and processes of culture in obedience to God's will. Mouw illustrates this with an imagined episode of Adam and Eve's first day collecting branches, which involves use of technology, distribution of labour and labeling system. While the fall, an ethical rebellion, didn't diminish the importance of cultural formation, it introduced patterns of cultural disobedience. Israel was chosen as a means of displaying some of God's original intentions for cultural processes and products.

Mouw discusses various major Kuyperian themes for cultural renewal. He notes that antithesis is not always obvious in reality. Pluriformity was necessary for created life to flourish. It even extended to churches, their fragments held together by Christ. Mouw summarizes Kuyper's view with the maxim, "What the Creator wants us to keep apart, let no human being try to squeeze together." Sphere sovereignty showed Kuyper's concern about the fundamental distinction between the Creator and creaturely. He agreed with enlightenment philosophers that the spheres should be liberated from the church's (medieval) control, but agreed with the medieval model that God's rule must be acknowledged in all spheres.

Many evangelicals regard politics as "the way of death" and therefore want to delimit the government's role. By contrast, Kuyper (for whom the political sphere was part of the creative design and could be life-giving) apportioned government a limited interventionist duty: adjudicate disputes and clarify boundaries between spheres, protect the weak within spheres and exercise its coercive power when necessary. Rejecting governmental financial assistance to the poor as a matter of principle, he nevertheless argued that if no help was forthcoming the state must help.

Although Kuyper has some vital insights to offer about Christian cultural and political leadership of the 21st century, some views need updating and intemperate statements and rhetorical excesses need rephrasing. In connection with Kuyper's racism, Mouw, using Herman Bavinck's notion that the image of God is only fully developed in the whole of humanity, posits that we need to think cross-culturally.

In spite of the discouraging climate, Mouw proposes, based on Kuyper's interest in Islam (albeit ambiguous), that Christian and Muslim should dialogue, an idea many evangelicals find difficult to accept. Kuyper pointed to one important topic for conversation: "our different ways of experiencing and understanding the divine call to serve the cause of righteousness in all areas of life." Furthermore, Muslims have a similar understanding of the nature of the human being and of the present human condition. This cross-religious thinking, together with cross-cultural thinking, is an "engagement in worldview," a term Mouw prefers to "worldview," since worldview is not a static but an ongoing dynamic activity.

Because times have changed, Mouw now wants to enhance the church's role, encouraging people in various fields of endeavour. He mentions Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City, which has a flourishing Center for Faith and Work, including an arts ministry for people in the Manhattan area, an indication that God's kingdom is larger than the church. Since the family sphere is shrinking, he suggests that churches, for example, become involved in mentoring.

Upholding that the Constantinian compromise harmed the church and that there are limits to the kinds of political compromises Christians can agree to, Mouw nevertheless observes that "the Constantinian project had its origins in a creative response to a significant cultural challenge." His view on the Constantinian compromise may need rethinking since it opened the door for Christians to persecute others.

Bert den Boggende has a PhD in British history and lives in Brooks, Alta.

#### Bert den Boggende

In his vision of active involvement in public life, Richard Mouw, president and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, wanted to steer his way between a privatized evangelicalism and liberal or Catholic approaches to public discipleship (ix). He found that in Dutch politician, journalist and educator Abraham Kuyper's "theology of culture." In short, easy to read chapters he lays out Kuyper's views in the book's first half and updates some views in the second. The book seems especially directed at evangelicals, who "have not been known for having a coherent theological-philosophical perspective on efforts to influence the policies and practices of the larger society" (xi), but is also useful for teachers and people unwilling to slog through scholarly tomes.

Kuyper, not content with a purely personal spirituality, argued that every Christian is called to be an agent of God's Kingdom in every area of life, basing this cultural mandate on Genesis 1:28 and John 3:16-17. The former gives a three-part mandate: to be fruitful concerns reproduction; to fill the earth is a call to cultural activity; and to have dominion means managing the

patterns and processes of culture in obedience to God's will. Mouw illustrates this with an imagined episode of Adam and Eve's first day collecting branches, which involves use of technology, distribution of labour and labeling system. While the fall, an ethical rebellion, didn't diminish the importance of cultural formation, it introduced patterns of cultural disobedience. Israel was chosen as a means of displaying some of God's original intentions for cultural processes and products.

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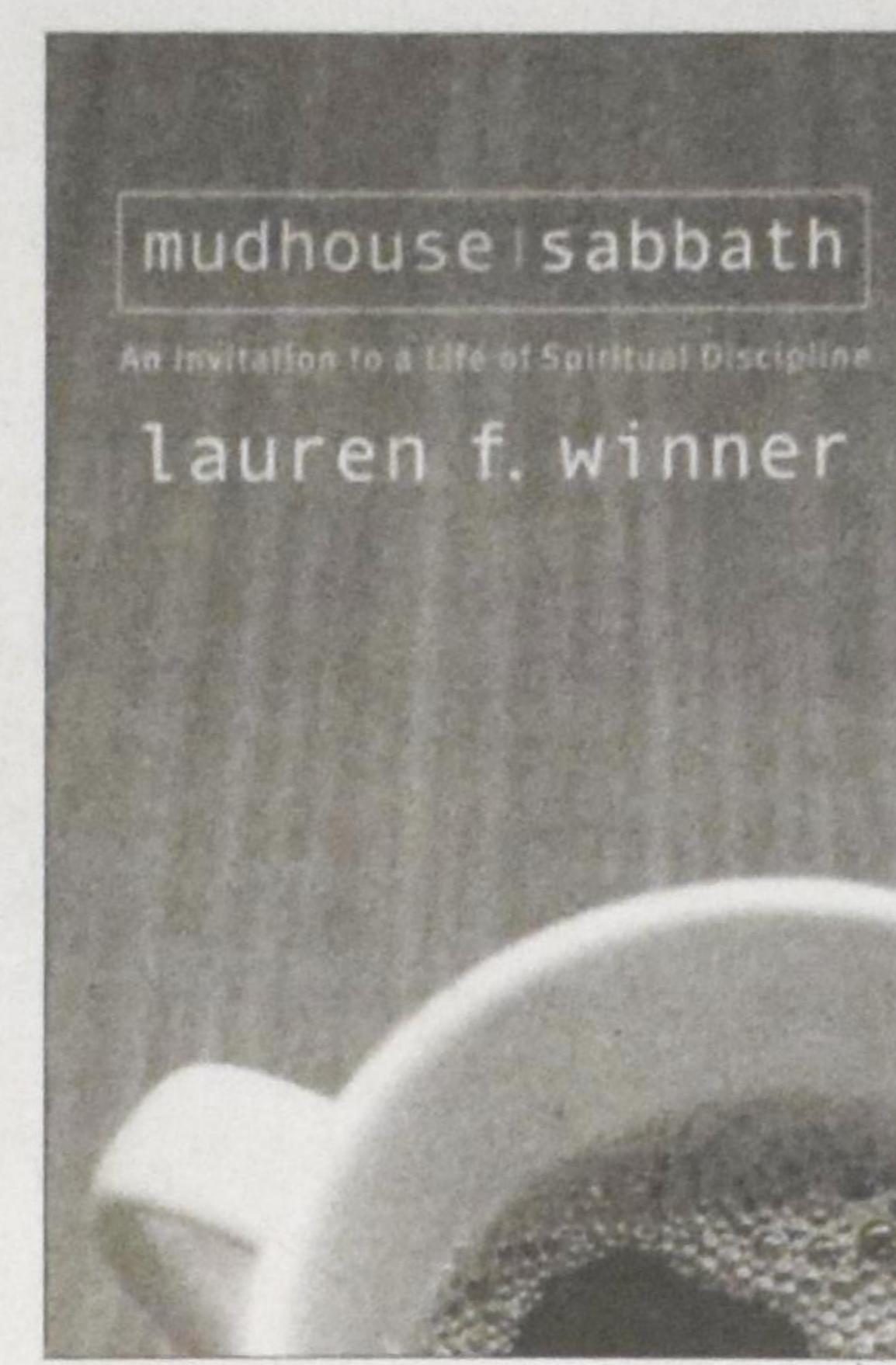


### Mermaids, cat's-eye glasses and a few things we could learn from Judaism

#### Anna Visser

As spiritual memoirist Lauren Winner traipsed across the stage of the B.J. Haan auditorium on the first Monday in October wearing appliquéd psychedelic polka dots and bedazzled cat's-eye glasses, students and faculty of Dordt College joined her in a journey of faith: what would it look like if we learned about Christianity from the principles of Judaism? The event was part of the college's "First Mondays Lecture Series," which brings biblically-based speakers and writers to Dordt each month to challenge and enrich the community both academically and spiritually.

In her talk entitled "At the Turning of the Year: What Christianity has to learn from Judaism and Life with God," Winner first gave a brief recounting of her life and faith journey. Brought up by a Jewish father and a Baptist mother, Winner was a devout Jew as a teen, but after college and a dream in which she was kidnapped by mermen representing Jesus, she converted to Christianity. As part of what Winner



#### Mudhouse Sabbath

by Lauren F. Winner  
Brewster, Massachusetts:  
Paraclete Press, 2003

calls an "unfortunately typical story," she distanced herself from Judaism for about two years, until she began to miss her old faith and its routines. Most of all, she missed the Jewish Sabbath. Winner explained that while Jews and Christians share the same God and biblical history, Christians have departed from historical practice, and would benefit from readopting a Jewish understanding of keeping the Sabbath holy.

Winner challenged her audience, explaining that all of the Jewish Sabbath laws and practices can be simplified to one law: do not create. When we stop trying to change creation, we remember that we are ultimately creatures, not creators. Therefore, said Winner, Sabbath rest is about reordering our lives and entering into God's rest. It is not about selfish recharging so we can be more productive in the future; rather, we rest in order to focus on God and have a dependent relationship with him.

This is also the story Winner tells in her book *Mudhouse Sabbath*. In the introduction of this spiritual memoir, Winner explains that while she is "still in that blissed-out newlywed stage" of her Christianity, she misses "the rhythms and routines [of Judaism] that drew the sacred down into the everyday." According to Winner, practice is to Judaism what belief is to Christianity, but Christians also need routines and practices, because "the practicing teaches us what it means to live as Christians."

Winner then describes eleven important Jewish practices, including Sabbath, prayer, diet, mezuzot and other spiritual habits, and outlines how Christians could use these same principles in everyday life in order to have a more disciplined faith. She does not suggest that Christians should start eating kosher or hang mezuzot on our doorposts, and she doesn't claim that the religions are equal, but she does challenge Christians to consider a more practiced faith.

The book is an easy read. It isn't overly theological or preachy. Nor is it a how-to guide or a textbook. It is a memoir, written in a friendly, conversational tone; it's Lauren Winner sharing with her readers how she experiences and discovers her faith, and inviting us to join the adventure with her. We can read it in a day, but think about it for a lifetime. The prose is easy; the concepts are not. Winner doesn't want us to sit back in an easy faith. She rather desires readers to be aware, and to grow constantly more in love with Jesus Christ. She wants to move from newlywed infatuation to deep, grownup love. And that takes work.

Winner challenges Christians to think of ways to be more intentional about faith: what would it look like if we observed a Sabbath more faithfully, devoting the time to God? What if we were more aware of what we ate – acknowledging that our hunger is truly about being dependent on God? What if we weren't afraid to make it clear to everyone who sees us that we are Christian?

There are no easy answers to these questions, but Winner encourages us to think about them and to begin to act on them. Through her explanations and stories, Winner allows us to admit our failures and join her on this pilgrimage to discover who God is, and who we are as his people.

Standing on the stage at Dordt, Lauren Winner showed that despite her crazy glasses and mermaid dreams, her journey is just like that of any other Christian, and she invited us all to echo her confession: "I am a person who is trying to be a Christian, and in telling that to you, I am inviting you to hold me to it."

Anna Visser is a sophomore at Dordt College where she is majoring in English, creative writing and music. She is from Ingersoll, Ont.



## Features

## Dusty in Jamaica

**Anna Visser**

Last summer I heard a pastor preach a sermon in which he called upon the congregation to "be dusty," to walk so closely behind Christ that we are visibly covered with the dust kicked up by his feet. I liked the image, and wrote "be dusty" on a sticky-note which bookmarks Matthew 5:16 in my Bible. I determined that I wanted to serve God in a different way this year.

In August, I signed up to go to Jamaica with Dordt College's **A Mission Out-Reach (AMOR)** team. I didn't know exactly why, or what I was getting into, except that God must have great things planned. I held on to that conviction, but was terrified until I boarded the airplane in Omaha, and then there was no turning back.

On December 30, I landed in Montego Bay, Jamaica with 20 other students from Dordt College and First Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa. We each had a suitcase of our own plus one other – filled with clothing, hygiene products, and lots of peanut butter to be donated to those in need. We loaded it all onto two buses and set out for what can only be called an adventure in Jamaica. From Dec. 30 until Jan. 7 we worked with an organization called Caribbean Lifetime Missions (CLM) to discover Jamaica and love its kids.

Before we left for Jamaica, the team prayed that we would be God's hands and feet there, showing his love and bringing glory to his name. Our time in Jamaica wasn't a conventional mission trip. We didn't build anything, we didn't go on prayer walks, and because Jamaicans observe time in a very different way than Americans (we were told that regardless of time zone, Jamaicans are always one hour behind Americans), we didn't always feel like we were doing much of anything, but God did answer our prayers. We were able to love the poor, the orphaned, the outcast, and be Christ to them.

We stayed at the CLM camp on top of a mountain near a village called Bamboo. We slept in modest dorms accompanied by crickets and geckos, took quick showers in frigid rainwater, ate wonderful Jamaican food made for us by the CLM cook, and grew as a team by playing games and laughing late into the night.

Each day, we came down off the mountain to work with kids all over the island. We built close relationships with the kids in Bamboo. At the beginning of the week we held a Kids' Jamboree at a church there, complete with a bouncy castle, balloon animals, hot dogs and Christmas presents for 300 kids. We let the kids braid our foreign blonde hair, played soccer and duck-duck goose, gave wild piggy-back rides, and sang "Father Abraham" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children" with unconstrained joy. By the end we were completely exhausted, and then the CLM workers told us we were going back the next day because we hadn't bonded with the kids enough!

We weren't thrilled about enduring this chaos for a second time, but we went back. This time we didn't serve lunch, give out gifts, or set up the bouncy castle so fewer kids came and we were able to learn their names and ask about their families and their homes. We played more games, sang more songs and gave more piggy-back rides.

Sometimes the kids only wanted to be held. Mostly, they just wanted to be loved. For three days we gave the kids in Bamboo attention they would not have gotten otherwise.

We also held a Jamboree in Kingston. In a community called "Majestic Gardens" in the middle of the capital where people live behind walls made of corrugated tin and own maybe one full set of clothes, we set up the bouncy castle, made balloon animals and let the kids cling to us for the day. We gave them peanut butter sandwiches and Christmas presents. And we saw a whole new side of poverty. The parents and kids became dangerous as they hoarded and fought over gifts, hitting and shoving each other and us as they grabbed as many plastic dolls

and toy cars as they could. We were instructed to leave for safety reasons, so we had to drop the

On one of these bus rides, I was looking out the window as the lush Jamaican foliage whizzed by and wondered: "Why am I here, God? What are you doing with me in Jamaica?" I realized that I had done all the same things on a previous mission trip in New Jersey, a lot closer to home. That seemed to make our work in Jamaica even more insignificant. Other than the palm trees, I could have had this same experience anywhere.

### Is this good ministry?

Lately, I've heard plenty of complaints about short-term mission trips. People say they benefit the missionary more than the community being served. People say that they are ineffective, even oppressive. Rich white kids come with their fancy cameras and nice clothes, do some good deeds and board an airplane a week later, never to return. The locals may never own a camera, may not own more than one pair of shoes, may never leave their hometown, and we hardly think twice about it. Is this good ministry?

Maybe there are more effective ways to do ministry, maybe it would be better to stay home and serve our own communities, maybe the church is going about missions wrong. I'm not sure. But I did discover that whether in Jamaica or New Jersey, these are Christ's children. They all eat peanut butter. They all crave attention. They all need love. In spite of the questions and doubts, this is a beautiful picture of the body of Christ and the wide expanse of God's kingdom. There is so much to be done, and so many are equipped to do it. What we were able to give them for a week is absolutely not enough, but it is a beginning.

One day in Bamboo I was holding a little girl named Amelia. She was tired and cold. I wrapped her up in a sweater and we sat off to the side, and as we sat watching the other kids play, she fell asleep. One of our Jamaican CLM leaders approached me and said, "You know, it might not seem like much, but this is ministry. She will remember this."

If we made one kid smile, if we gave one kid a peanut butter sandwich on a day with no other food, if we hugged one kid who doesn't get very much love, if we gave one kid a good memory of the American who gave him a piggy-back ride, God answered our prayers. We were his hands and feet; we were love; we glorified his name. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Be dusty.



Anna Visser is a sophomore at Dordt College where she is majoring in English, creative writing and music. She is from Ingersoll, Ont. and loves peanut butter!



kids we were holding and board the bus. It was the worst moment of the trip. It hurt to leave the kids we had already grown to love without saying goodbye.

When we weren't playing duck-duck goose and giving piggy-back rides, we were visiting sick and orphaned kids. We went to a children's hospital on New Year's Eve and brought teddy bears, and we went to a special needs orphanage, where many of the kids suffered from preventable disorders and whose parents could not or did not want to care for them. We also went to a regular orphanage where the kids were well-cared for, but craved attention and love, and we wished there was more we could do. An hour of attention from a group of white American kids was not nearly enough.

Besides interacting with the kids, a highlight of the week in Jamaica was the riding the bus. Every time the team went anywhere, all 22 of us piled like sardines into a bus and careened down the mountain on narrow winding roads at horrifying speeds, honking at corners to warn other drivers and pedestrians of our approach. The first few times we were sure we would never survive the week, but by the end, it seemed normal.

## Features

## On tutorhood

### Adele Konyndyk

In an early scene in the movie *Wit*, an esteemed professor of metaphysical poetry named Vivian Bearing (Emma Thompson) recalls learning how to read. There she is in a dash of sunlight, blonde and young and bending over a storybook on a low sofa as her father watches from a chair.

At a word Vivian does not understand, she asks her father for help. "Say it in bits," he directs. So she does, sounding it out: *So-por-i-fic...* "Soporific?" she stumbles out, not exactly rightly, but close enough. When she asks what it means, her father says, "Causing sleep – makes you sleepy."

Vivian goes back to the book, satisfied. But soon she bolts back up. "The bunnies are sleeping! They're sleeping! Just like you said!" she shouts, looking astonished and grateful for his guidance. Looking wildly, unforgettably alive.

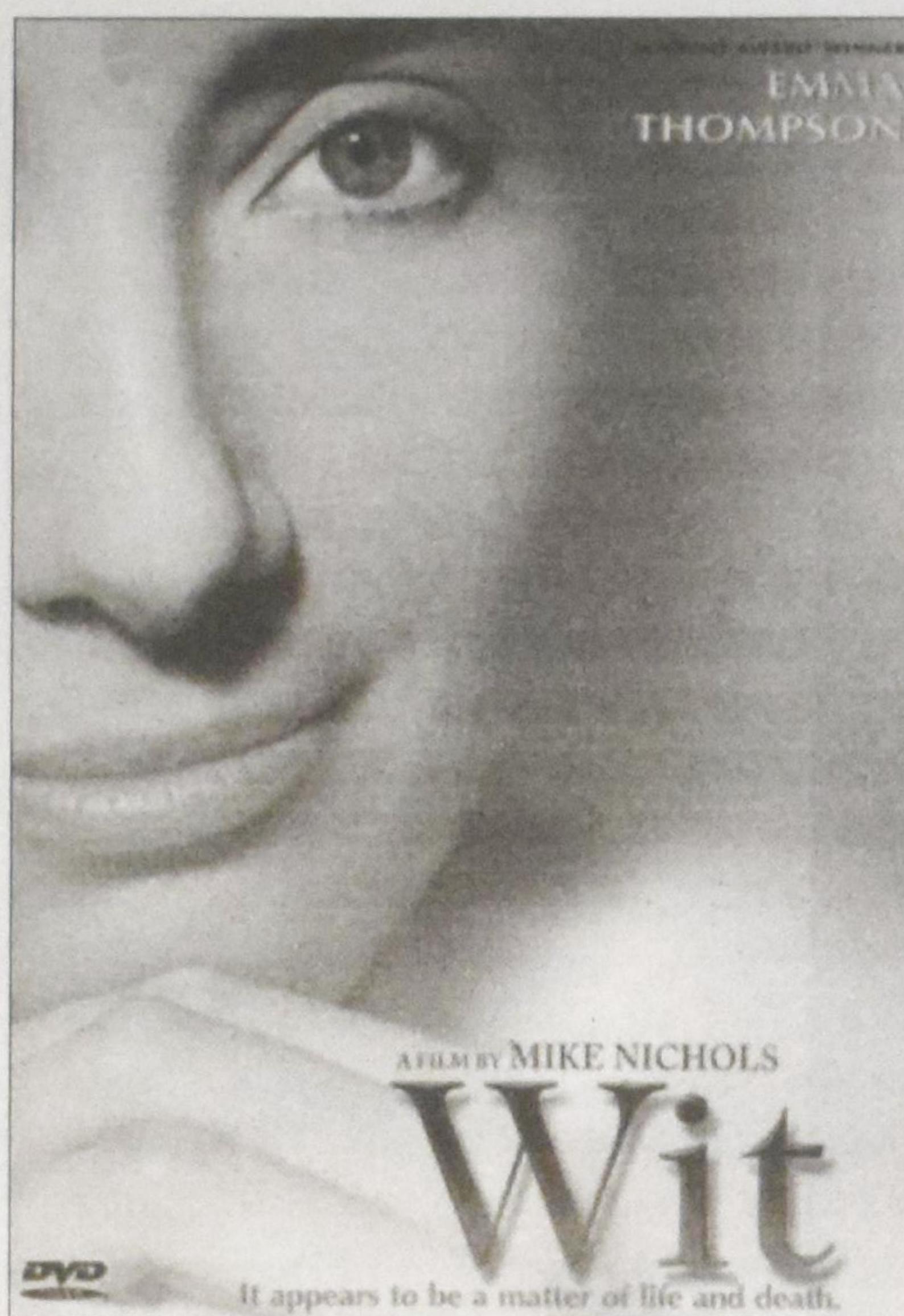
### Learning to read, reading to learn

I remember very little about learning to read. I realized this during the two-day training I received to become a volunteer literacy tutor. Many of my fellow tutors-to-be shared entertaining, even beautiful, moments when the bulb of reading comprehension went bright – instants of seemingly sudden clarity.

I have no such story. My childhood seems a wash of curiosity and delight lit by letters, words and, eventually, books. I know I haven't been able to read my whole life, but in a way that's how it feels. It made me worry about relating to a student at a beginner level. To my relief, I was matched with a student at the final skill book. "He's learned to read – but what he needs help with now is reading to learn," said my instructor.

Since January, this student and I have met twice a week in a third-floor literacy centre room with pink-red walls and one window. I can see little else out this window than a sprawl of branches from the tree below. I hate when they're bare, and I know my student does too; our winter sessions were almost always book-ended by talk of how cold the wind was on the walk over or how tired we were of ice.

Most of our lessons involve distinguishing vowel sounds, reading stories and learning new vocabulary. A few months in, we had a lesson on endings – suffixes, as they're officially called. For one exercise I listed six words in blue ink: child, mother, father, sister, brother,



individuals – who had suffered in secret for years, fearing even their own family would believe them worthless.

Eventually my student pointed to a word on the list of –hood words I had made.

"What this mean?" he asked, with his finger on *child-hood*.

"I know child," he said. "But not like that – with hood. People asked me that word before, but I didn't know what they're asking."

### *I have come to see tutoring as one of many seats to take in this world's diverse academy of compassion.*

My answer was full of mumbles and pauses. I ended up just going down the list of words – mother, father, sister, etc.

"See," I said. "All of these are things you can *be*. So, childhood means *being* a child."

I know very little about my student's childhood. But I do know this: when he was five years old he became a refugee, fleeing a country embroiled in war. His parents were killed; he came to Canada as an orphan. This was history dispatched to me in a bulleted list when I first learned he and I had been "matched" – alongside his age, his status as a single father and his soft-spoken demeanor. Since then we'd talked only a few times of his home country – about how its heat would compare to our cold, or how he'd like to take his children there someday.

Before we moved on to the next exercise, he said. "So all they mean when they say childhood is what I was like as a boy. Like that?"

"Right," I said. "So I guess you'll know what people are asking about, won't you?"

He smiled – a very small smile, a sheepish and close-lipped smile, but still a smile.

### A kind of kindness

When *Wit*'s Vivian Bearing recalls learning to read, she is 48 years old and dying – of cancer. Her voice cracks at the memory; she calls it "the very hour of the very day when [she] knew words would be her life's work." Against the cold swirl of unknown medical terms she will say, with complete sincerity: "My only defense is the acquisition of vocabulary."

I see myself in Vivian. I, too, consider words to be "my life's work." They are, to me, foun-

parent on lined paper. I then added to them the ending –hood.

"Have you ever heard any of these words before?" I asked my student. He studied them, squinted down. I knew such questions could make him sheepish – bashful. But he would ask me for help or direction if he needed it; he would not be ashamed.

I'd seen the link between illiteracy and shame in my tutor training. I'd heard stories of people isolated and ashamed all because of one inability. A few of my fellow tutors even spoke of parents and family members – bright, creative, and talented

dational to vocation (as a freelance writer) and my most faithful way of relating to my Creator and his created. From grade school to grad school I have enjoyed reveling in their peculiarities, their meanings and their mysteries. And I take some pride in having a certain "way with words" – the kind of literary abilities Vivian terms her "cleverness" or her "wit."

But I know literary abilities alone cannot console or alter us for the better. No. This lesson is the ache and glory at *Wit*'s core. On her deathbed, Vivian has no doubt that she has given knowledge to her students, but she laments the lack of tenderness in its delivery.

"Nothing would be worse than a detailed scholarly analysis and . . . erudition, interpretation, complication," are some of her deathbed words, and I believe them. "Now is the time for . . . dare I say it . . . kindness," she says, relishing the care of a lively and compassionate nurse. And I do not simply pity her – I understand her. She sees the emptiness of words without empathy.

I see this emptiness in the isolated experience of illiterate individuals. I hear a longing for kindness in my student's very voice – from the uplift of his answers to the quiet tone he takes when saying plural words, since his accent seems to make the letter "s" especially difficult.

Even when our two-hour sessions are weighty with my stumbles – my poorly explained terms or my ineffective lesson plans – kindness is still there to be strived for. It is a solid to grip when insecurity mashes at the sides of my mind about whether or not I'm doing the *right* or *proper* work with words. I know, after all, that the God I serve is not praised for his "loving-cleverness," but for his "loving-kindness."

I have come to see tutoring as one of many seats to take in this world's diverse academy of compassion. I am glad for it, even with its challenges. For four hours a week, I can see – syllable by syllable, suffix by suffix, and story by story – the glory of language at work between teacher and student. We can sit side by side, at the same table. We can talk of our childhoods or of the lack of leaves on trees. We can write words out or look them up, together.

We can be astonished and sheepish and baffled and grateful as we puzzle over the page we have been given.

We are, in our reader-hood, wildly, kindly alive.

(Adapted from a piece first published in The Well at [www.intervarsity.org/gfm/well](http://www.intervarsity.org/gfm/well)).

Adele Konyndyk is a freelance writer living in Hamilton, Ont.



**"Illiteracy is best defined as a lack of skills perceived by individuals or groups as being necessary to fulfil their self-determined objectives as individuals, family and community members, consumers, employees and members of social or religious organizations. ...Literacy is the ability to read, write, comprehend and use mathematics adequately to satisfy the requirement the learner sets for him or herself as being important for his or her own life."** Manitoba Education and Training, 1989; p.2

**"A person is functionally illiterate if he or she cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his or her community, and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for their own and for the community's development."** UNESCO, as quoted in Butler, 1990; p.4.



Reading can be a challenging skill to learn.

## Features

CC is pleased to present a four-part series on the topic of pacifism. Our guest writers offer perspectives that are independent of each other and provide a dynamic cross-disciplinary juxtaposition. Bert den Boggende, historian, takes us through the centuries, surveying Christian attitudes about pacifism. Brent van Staalduin, writer, offers reflection and opinion based on his experiences in the military and teaching overseas in Kuwait and South Korea. We encourage our readers to offer their feedback by way of a letter to the editor ([editor@christiancourier.ca](mailto:editor@christiancourier.ca)) or comments online at [christiancourier.ca](http://christiancourier.ca).

## The battle for language



Brent van Staalduin

In April 2011, *The Banner* published an article of mine ("*Mash'Allah: Whatever the will of God*") that looked admiringly at the religious language and actions of Muslims in Kuwait, by focusing on how thoroughly the beliefs they espouse are integrated into everything they think, do, feel and say. I think it's relevant here to extend that infusion to another reality of the region: violent language. The emergence of Islam can be traced back to the harsh desert environment where it was born and the tribal and military maneuverings of Mohammed. In the unforgiving desert, conflict was – and is – not settled by dialogue, but by the sword, and its language reflects this.

This is something we share with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We have many of the same geographical origins, of course, but we Christians also have a history that, if we're honest, is as saturated by blood as any other religion or culture. One doesn't need to dig too deeply into our history – distant and recent – to find examples of this, such as Old Testament purges, the Crusades, Colonialism or even rallying for the "War on Terror" under the banner of the cross.

As a result, like the Muslims, we have grown up with the language of war and violence both in our cultural surroundings but also in our churches and places of faith. Thankfully, the message of Christ – the one we most fervently try to emulate – is not one of violence but of love, and I have to acknowledge that today's Christians are not typically the aggressors. However, despite the overwhelmingly clear message of peace in the New Testament, it is striking that the language of war remains so indelibly etched into Christian culture.

In fact, our employment of the language of the sword is so pervasive, I would suggest that its prevalence rivals that of the other extra-biblical sayings and creeds and tomes that we profess to guide our ways. We urge our Christian soldiers on, wage spiritual warfare, rail against the Enemy and hear from our pulpits about the battle for our very souls. We name our sports teams Crusaders and Knights, call upon our prayer-warriors to intercede, gird our spiritual armour and label our youth as Insurgents and Soldiers for Christ.

There is nothing inherently wrong or right with any of these – I am just listing a few examples of the language we use in our churches and communities. And I have no personal issue with the

battle-hardened realities of our faith: I do believe we are in a war against Satan's misleading and misdirection. In that, I would happily state that I am not a pacifist and I think most Christians would agree or, at the very least, acknowledge the necessity and reality for such a position.

### Conflict-scarred hands

But I would express a concern about standing for or against pacifism, non-pacifism, or any spot in between without at the very least acknowledging our conflict-scarred hands and that our words have been molded by them. There is danger present when a pacifist declares his views without an awareness of warfare language, a non-pacifist does the same without knowing from where her language comes, or the middle-grounder tries to placate both sides without knowing from where we all come.

I think this is relevant to our discussions of pacifism not primarily for the purposes of condemnation or criticism of the things we say and sing and read, but more importantly as a point of discernment. Regardless of where we place ourselves on the pacifist spectrum – notice I did not say divide, as this issue is far more than an either-or entity – I think we should keenly be aware not only of what we believe and do, but particularly of what we say.

I'm not suggesting that we go back in to all of our favourite texts, hymns, titles, and names to clear them of references to violence and battle. No, there is value there, and those images and words are some of the most powerful extensions of our experience on earth, as well as apt descriptions of the struggles we encounter in our daily efforts to further the kingdom. But as we move forward in time and faith, we should discern whether or not using battle language – or any language, for that matter – meets the calling for where we hope to be.

The challenge is, according to a pastor friend of mine, discerning how to present to new or nonbelievers "metaphors we might take for granted." The language isn't primarily for ourselves, but for the world into which we have been called as Christ's witnesses. Our language matters – and that language is our legacy to ourselves and, more importantly, to those we hope to love into the kingdom. ▶

*Read more about Brent van Staalduin and his work at [brentvans.com](http://brentvans.com). He lives in Hamilton, Ont.*

## Pacifism: controversial texts



Bert den Boggende

In 1983, while doing research at Swarthmore College, Pa., I was invited to discuss pacifism in three Sunday school classes at Broomall's small CRC. In contrast to these friendly discussions about different interpretations of various texts, World War I English conscientious objectors appearing before tribunals faced a usually hostile military member who bombarded them with Old Testament texts that he thought proved beyond doubt that God was a God of Battle. However, this dominant war strand should be interpreted in the light of the New Testament (see Matt. 5:21), which reflects a peaceable conduct of members of God's Kingdom. Even though Reformed tradition opposes quoting isolated texts, these texts cause sufficient misunderstandings that they deserve closer attention.

With the New Testament seemingly continuing the war strand, the tribunal's military representative referred to several texts. In Matt. 10:34 Jesus states that he did not come to earth to bring peace but the sword. However, in the light of Luke 12:51, it becomes clear that Jesus' coming brings about division and does not refer to war.

Jesus announces in Mark 13 that there will be wars, graphically depicted in Revelation's eschatological warfare. These wars are due to evil influences of the teachings of false Christs and false prophets. There is nothing in Jesus' teaching warranting his disciples to participate in these wars.

In Luke 22:36 Jesus seems to command his disciples to arm themselves. When they reply that they have two swords, Jesus remarks that it is enough; in fact, when Peter uses a sword in the garden of Gethsemane, he is told to put it back in its place (Matt. 26:52). Jesus comments that all drawing the sword will perish by it, a statement military tribunal members interpreted as a warrant for waging a defensive war. The context makes clear that Jesus does not refer to war, although the sword will recoil on those using it, either in defence or in aggression. Early Christians drew the opposite conclusion than the military representative.

It is argued that since Jesus praised the centurion and did not condemn his profession (Matt. 8, Luke 7), Jesus implicitly accepted war. As the story of Zacchaeus makes clear, the argument from silence is questionable. Using the argument from silence, Jesus accepted graft. No further comment seems necessary.

In a Luke 11 parable Jesus refers to an armed strong man assailed by an even stronger one. The point Jesus makes is not about war and armaments but about (false) security. Does Jesus approve of burglary when he compares the coming of the Son of Man with a thief breaking in?

According to military tribunal members,

Jesus' comment about rendering to Caesar what's Caesar's implied that religious scruples should not interfere with duty to the state. However, the issue is not war but tax; the implication here is eisegesis rather than exegesis.

Jesus tells Pontius Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world, otherwise his disciples would fight (John 18:36). The military representatives concluded that Jesus would wish his followers to fight out of loyalty to one's country. This is a strange conclusion, since Jesus just had stated that his kingdom was not of this world.

### Most problematic text

The temple's cleansing was the most problematic text for COs. Only John's gospel mentions Jesus using a whip, an action frequently interpreted as Jesus using violence. Some scholars have suggested that a more correct rendering of the Greek would make it evident that the whip was used only on the animals. Be that as it may, even if Jesus used violence, the use of a whip should not be equated with the acceptance of warfare. In driving out the animals and money changers Jesus asserts his authority to purify the temple (see Mal. 3:1-4). Significantly, the temple guard did not retaliate, which more than likely would have occurred if Jesus used violence.

Military tribunal members also referred to Paul's military metaphors describing the Christian way of life. Again, these references were taken out of context. The fight of faith is not against flesh and blood.

In Rom. 13 Paul admonishes believers to submit to governing authorities. As is the case with Jesus' comment to render unto Caesar, the war implication is one of eisegesis. It may be noted that in the same chapter Paul writes that Christians have the obligation of loving their neighbours. It has often been remarked that laying down one's life for friends (neighbours) illustrates this love. For soldiers who did so for that reason, this may be true, but Paul calls for reconciliation, not killing.

These controversial texts really don't justify a Christian's participation in warfare, but it also should be kept in mind that the New Testament gives no clear-cut teaching about pacifism. ▶

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## Columns



Marian Van Til



A few years ago in an email conversation with six women from an online Patrick O'Brian literary group, one of them made a claim I wasn't used to hearing. The women know that I'm a Christian, and faith came up. In a private email to one of them I asserted the need for a Saviour, for myself and for the world. She then made two assertions of her own: the world is only getting better, and she herself feels no need whatsoever to be "saved" – from anything. I was taken aback. The biblical doctrine of total depravity is not something I've ever needed convincing to believe.

Recently I was listening to a sermon by John Piper, part of his astute, soul-affecting series on Romans (see [DesiringGod.org](http://DesiringGod.org)). He was impressing on his hearers the astounding wonder of God's grace to us, thoroughly undeserved. "But most people don't believe they need it," he said. His dad, a Southern evangelist, had warned, "Johnny, the problem is not getting people saved. It's getting them [to see they're] lost." There it was again. Not believing you're lost. Not seeing that you richly deserve the wrath and "righteous judgment" of God – or that it exists.

Paul tells us we need saving because "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). And: "Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (2:5). My internet friend would roll her eyes at such ancient, mythic melodrama.

Modern sophisticates scoff at the notion of hell. And how many of us orthodox Christians downplay it? – though Jesus himself surely does not. Many people smirk in mild amusement at famous old paintings of "The Last Judgment." But many of those same people wish themselves a heaven and a "good" God; i.e., a God who doesn't judge. Most of us are doing the best we can. What's to judge?

But the God of the Bible, the one true God who was not devised within our own imaginative yearnings, detests sin. "Who can endure the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appears?" asks Malachi (3:2). And Hebrews warns, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:31).

If God is God – whom saints and angels confess as thrice holy – we cannot stand in his hallowed presence because he cannot stand our unrighteousness. We're doomed apart from his Antidote to our awful disease.

## The dreadful hands of the living God

### Among the damned

One person whose scoffing was stopped short by an unforeseen understanding of God's wrath was Peter Hitchens, brother of the infamous atheist Christopher who recently died of cancer, unrepentant. Peter Hitchens, a literal Bible-burner, had been as rebellious against God as his brother was. He gradually became less hostile but was by no means a convert. Until, that is, he closely examined a painting of Rogier van der Weyden's 15th century "Last Judgment" which he saw in France while on vacation. No smirking for him at the naked figures fleeing the pit of hell. It suddenly terrified him. In an instant God's Spirit moved him to fear God's wrath – to know, as he wrote later, that he was "among the damned" – unless God's grace in Christ should save him.

Hearing accounts like Hitchens's and currently listening to Piper's Romans sermons have made me think again about God's holiness, wrath and grace. We Reformed folks want to avoid "cheap grace." But do we? Or has the self-aggrandizing spirit of our age seeped into us too, urging us to think that most of us aren't all *that* bad, that God's "wrath" in the face of our "sin" is just a bit much? In our inclusive age, taking too seriously God's anger against our "unrighteousness" is just embarrassing. It's certainly no way to win converts, is it? You might ask Peter Hitchens about that.

The wonderful, savoury irony is that when we confess that Christ died for us wretched sinners we're acknowledging that God rescues us from God. The grace of God rescues us from the wrath of God. In Christ, God gives us the righteousness he demands of us. My online friend won't be convinced of her moral, spiritual deadness apart from the Spirit's renewing work in her. Nor will any of us who were born into the Reformed fold.

Piper summarizes God's truth from the first verses of Romans: "You will not ever be good enough to provide a righteousness of your own that could be the ground of your justification. Either Christ will be your righteousness, or you will perish. And when you have settled this with God, and trusted Christ for righteousness, then by that same faith savour him so supremely that you make progress in severing the roots of sin in your life. In other



Rogier van der Weyden's The Last Judgement.

## Artful Eye



Circlet of hope.

LINDA SIEBENGA

### Bracelet from Liberia

There is a certain weight to it,  
this bracelet you brought from Liberia  
made from the barb wire  
and implements of primitive  
warfare.  
Sometimes its lightweight  
presence  
hangs heavy on my wrist,  
on this carefree life  
free from the terrifying  
fears and tortuous realities  
these women have experienced.  
They have taken the tools of war  
and beaten them into circlets of hope,  
remembrance.  
Please do not forget us!



Linda Siebenga is a poet  
living in Central Alberta.  
Her latest work is **Earth  
Against Your Cheek**.  
You can find Linda's  
website at [inscribe.org](http://inscribe.org)  
under Members.



words, fight the fight of faith not in order to be justified,  
but because you are justified."

And then we'd better let the world see it, individually and communally.

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## Columns

## Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



## Heavyweight January

Last month was heartbreaking for our community. Four weeks, four successive deaths, waves of sorrow attending the birth of the new year like labour pains. I had connections to each person who passed away.

One was my dad's best friend. When Dad was ill, battling his lymphoma for a decade, Hank visited him weekly. Theirs was a robust friendship, cemented by their shared roots in Groningen, shared immigrant experiences in Canada and shared faith in the Lord. Hank's jolly outlook boosted Dad's spirits and Dad's spiritual calm steadied Hank. Before Dad's death in 1996, Hank took him back to Holland on a guys-only road trip. Bedum, Ten Boer, Noordpolderzijl – scuffed places, humble beginnings. Hank gave a moving tribute at my dad's funeral and I attended his as my own quiet tribute to the sacredness of their friendship.

Two others called home to glory were lifetime members of our church. Again, strong ties laid these losses at the door of my heart. They had been pioneer members. I taught their children and grandchildren. I know their great-grandchildren by name. When you live and work in a small town your whole life, and you confess the communion of the saints, everyone is family. You suffer loss to the third and the fourth generation.

Jessica, 21, passed away, too, a dearly-loved child of our church. Paralyzed at age five with a virus, she had been tenderly cared for at home by her family and faithfully remembered in prayer throughout 16 years of illness by both our congregation and the local Christian school community. My class once created a hallway bulletin board with a huge tree in the centre. Every student and staff member in the school wrote Jessica a caring note, a hundred or more leaves of love tacked to the branches.

## Clinging to Calvinism

These are the days when I cling to my Calvinism. Oh, I've struggled with election and free will, grappled mightily to resolve tensions between limited atonement and universal salvation, sought to balance God's omnipotence and goodness with sin and evil, tragedy and death. Two particularly fine and helpful books were Gerald Sittser's *A Grace Disguised* and Richard Mouw's *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport*.

Over time, I developed a couple of my own simple illustrations to unify what seem to be opposing concepts. Here's a coin, I'd say to my catechism class. It's one whole thing, but it has two sides. My human vision is capable of taking in only one side at a time. It's simply not possible for me to see both heads and tails simultaneously. But God, being God, isn't limited like I am. His divine gaze can merge what I can't. Or I'd show one of those optical illusion drawings that include two faces or scenes. You focus your attention on one

set of details and see a witch. Re-focus your eyes and voilà, there's a beautiful woman. Two conflicting portraits in one design. Okay ... I've already admitted they were simple illustrations. But they do embody the idea that it's possible to combine polarized truths in a kind of "willing suspension of disbelief," to borrow a phrase from the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. That willingness to suspend disbelief, to swing contradictions like so many buttons on one string, is faith. It's acknowledging my own limitations and ceding to God's grander abilities and plans, not God as abstract deity or "the force," but the God who brings himself to the bargaining table, who is, as Sittser describes him, a "suffering Sovereign." Not a God who sticks it to you, but the God holding your hand, sitting beside you in the ashes.

I cling to my Calvinism because it offers the best comfort at the graveside. Here is where I stand, not denying that cancer, pneumonia and stroke cause death, but not granting them the final say. God is in control. In life and in death.

My favourite psalm, an amulet around my neck, is Psalm 121, a psalm I memorized originally because it was short. (Yes, because it was short.) But it's become an everyday touchstone for its extravagant confession about God's solicitous concern for my life.

## The aerial view

It took me awhile to get it. How can it be true that my foot will not slip or that the Lord will keep me from all harm? I've slipped many times. I've been harmed a few times, too. But the key is to choose to look at the psalm from another angle – the aerial view, not the close-up. To squint deliberately at the summative focus. My daily life will surely be crashed by storms, as Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders so graphically portrays, but the epilogue of my life will be this: that I was deemed a royal heir, guarded vigilantly by a sentry God who never slept, protected from the sun's burning rays by a God who, slave-like at my side, shaded me with palm branches.

Dad. Hank. Jessica. Pioneers of the Wyoming CRC. Israel. All who have eyes to see and ears to hear. A sovereign God watches over our coming and going, both now and forevermore. A quixotic God, Omnipotent Servant, worthy to be worshipped, even at the open grave. ▶

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An optical illusion: focus on one set of details and you see a witch, but adjust your focus and you see a beautiful woman.

## Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



*Women are suffering physical, emotional and financial burnout ... as leading caregivers. While resources abound for caregivers in general, little help exists for women caring for seriously ill husbands.*

– Diana B. Denholm



Q. My husband had his first stroke at the age of 55. I was 50 at the time and took a sabbatical from my work to look after him. He recovered somewhat, but could no longer work full time and has been receiving a disability pension ever since. Because we still had two adult children (out of three) in our home at that time, I eventually went back to work part-time. The stroke seems to have changed his personality. During most of our married life he was an easy-going and dependable husband, father and provider. Now he is short tempered and irritable a lot of the time. He told me he feels useless and a burden to his family. This has been going on now for seven years.

While he takes daily medication he continues to suffer small strokes on a regular basis. Presently, he is in a wheelchair and putters around the house as best as he can. His speech has deteriorated and he is showing symptoms of dementia and short-term memory loss. On the upside, we are now empty nesters and when the adult children drop by he visibly lightens up. Needless to say, those are our best times together and I make sure the kids visit regularly.

The problem I am struggling with is our lack of good communication. It seems our skills in this area have gone down the tube. The second problem is my overwhelming sense of sadness. Before all this happened we chatted off and on about our retirement plans. Now I know none of it will happen. Also the idea of him not getting better but worse with time saddens me and I often wonder how long this will go on.

R. My heart goes out to you and your spouse. Not only do you need a lot of energy to manage each day, you need courage to make the best of your situation with few or no regrets in the future. I suggest you read Diana B. Denholm's recently published *The Caregiving Wife's Handbook*. The book is based on Denholm's own experience of caregiving for her husband for more than ten years. While she writes specifically for long-term caregivers whose spouses are terminally ill, her suggestions are very helpful in any long-term spousal

## Caregiving for one's spouse

caregiving situation. She acknowledges that there are always two sides to every story and so she gives clear instructions on how to talk your way to understanding one another's needs (you mentioned that your communication has broken down somewhat). Denholm stresses that long-term care of a spouse suffering from a life threatening illness can become complex and overwhelming, and how partners communicate during this difficult time will help or hinder the marriage and the remaining time they have together.

Denholm suggests the caregiver make a list of all the issues she wants to discuss with her spouse. She then sorts them out into four categories: things I want to say but do not expect a response to, things I want to say but won't because it does not make a difference, things I want to say but should only share with a friend, and things I really need to talk about, know about, have resolved or need to make a decision about. Denholm then describes the process spouses need to follow when they tackle the fourth category and work toward some kind of resolution they can

live with. By now you may be asking whether all the discussions spouses have concerning category four have a happy ending? The answer is that they don't. But recognizing this makes you feel you are not alone and that many of your emotional responses are common and normal.

Your sadness about your spouse's condition is certainly understandable. Long-term illness of any kind often involves loss. You lost your easy-going and dependable spouse. He lost his health and the role he played as breadwinner of the family. Both of you lost your jobs. He lost his permanently, and you lost yours for a time. Both of you lost your plans for retirement and the picture you had of how you wanted to spend this stage of your lives. You may want to talk through these losses with one another and begin to accept that life is different for you and your spouse now. Both of you can still have quality of life but you may need to learn what now nourishes the needs of your soul, body and mind. Also, talking to someone you trust may help you process your feelings and thoughts in a way that allows you to move forward even though it is painful. While you did not mention the effect your spouse's strokes have had on your faith, I would encourage you to talk with a caring pastor or spiritual director so that you can keep your body and mind healthy while caring for your spouse ... as well as yourself. ▶

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## Columns



*The old is dying and the new cannot be born: in the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms will appear.*

— Antonio Gramsci, Marxist thinker  
I will make everything new.

— Jesus Christ, the beginning and the end.

We all have heard of the “Ten Lost Years” from 1929-1939, usually labelled “The Great Depression,” which was more severe in the North America than elsewhere.

When this economic disaster started here, some 22 percent of the labour force worked on farms. Between 1929 and 1932 most of these jobs disappeared as agriculture became a victim of its own success thanks to better seeds, better fertilizer, better farming practices and widespread mechanization, which was fuelled by an abundance of cheap oil.

The result of this accelerating productivity caused output to increase faster than demand, resulting in much lower prices. That, combined with a sudden influx of millions of surplus workers, changed the structure of the economy. It was this, more than anything else that led to rapidly declining incomes. Farmers then (like workers now) borrowed heavily to sustain living standards and production. Because neither the farmers nor their bankers anticipated

## Imagining the new creation

the steepness of the price declines, a credit crunch quickly ensued as farmers simply couldn't repay what they owed. As a result the banks too became victims of declining agricultural incomes, and thousands of them went belly up.

Then WWII came to the rescue: the conflict with Germany and Japan revved up the industrial base and employed the millions of idle bodies, enlisting them both in the army and in the arms industry. Overnight the deep depression disappeared.

Fast forward to today. We now find ourselves in a similar situation to 80 years ago, courtesy of “progress” again. This time, however, that progress is not through greater farm efficiency but through enhanced computer power, the software revolution, and the globalization of jobs, many of which have been dispatched to lower wage countries such as China. For a while the reckoning was postponed as rapidly rising real estate prices, fuelled by cheap money and cheating

banks, created the illusion of wealth. But then the housing bust came. Economists blamed the debacle in the 1930s on tight money, so this time the experts did the opposite: they poured trillions into the banking system, without producing a cure. Bankers got their big bonuses, but the common folk kept on suffering.

### A dying order

Indeed, the old is dying; the new cannot be born, and a great variety of morbid symptoms are appearing. The USA now has 6.6 million fewer jobs than it did just four years ago, and 23 million people would like to work but have dropped out. Also wages have been falling and poverty is rampant. What we are experiencing in 2012 is again a fundamental re-alignment of the economy. Just as 80 years ago the jobs of farm hands never returned — now two percent of the labour force produce more food than the nation can absorb — thanks to shipping jobs to Asia and greater productivity, we again have a permanent surplus of labour.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, an economist at Columbia University, suggests that in the current situation the best solution is to concentrate on two fields for the jobs of the future: education and health, expanding the service economy well beyond the current 70 percent. At the same time this Nobel Prize winner suggests that we better prepare

for a much lower living standard. Making the service sector bigger is easier said than done. In the U.S. already 17 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is spent on health care — more than in any country — with a very low success rate. The same holds true for education. The vested interests in both fields are just too difficult to dislodge.

My proposal is different. It is plain that the old order is dying. In 1939 war was the cure. That is no longer an option, even though some Republicans would like to attack Iran. The only way to heal our situation is to make peace with the physical world by imagining the new creation to come. Bonhoeffer starts his 200 page Creation and Fall (dealing with Genesis 1-3) with these remarkable words: “The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it acts from the end, it proclaims its message from the end.” The Greek word for “end” is telos. Jesus in Matthew 5:48 tells us to be “telos-minded” — “be telos-minded as I am telos-minded” (*teleios* is the Greek word there), which really means that now already our life must reflect the “perfection,” the “whole-ness” of the New Creation. ↗

Bert Hielema wonders when churches will hire environmental leaders to coach believers in “making all things new.” After all, “we can’t do anything without Christ and Christ won’t do anything without us.”



*Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz suggests focusing our resources on health and education, but cautions that we will have to prepare for a lower standard of living in days to come.*



Kenny Warkentin

I've been on the blogging journey for almost seven years, and it has been quite challenging writing about God, sex and culture. Terminology and wording have increasingly become very important, as words and statements can be very subjective and can be misconstrued if you are not authentic in your writing.

Much is being written today about sexuality and gender, particularly within the Body of Christ. How we dialogue about these issues is thus very important. The use of emails, blogs, Facebook and other online media can result in dangerous misinterpretation.

When I write I try to clarify as much as possible the topics that I address, and have found that despite my best efforts people can still read something all together different through the eyes of their own life journey and interpretations. One thing that helps bring clarity, as well as an important sense of authenticity, is to use story and one's own journey. This is important because one of the big debates in Christian culture is over identity. How do we descriptively

## Authentic reality

identify ourselves as it pertains to our sexual identity?

I have come to understand that my ultimate validation comes from God and not those around me. He defines me and my sexuality. Not out of hatred, but of immense love for me. He wants me to honour him and my sexuality is a gift from him. Prior to this understanding of sexuality, I used the term gay as a descriptive identity. I was attracted to guys sexually, so I was gay. I acted out on that attraction and didn't see anything wrong with it, even though I had grown up in the church and was a Christian. Because I had this sexual attraction, it must have meant God made me this way.

For many people within the Christian community, the use of the word gay or lesbian as a descriptive label works. Within that context these words may have various definitions. To some people these words may mean that their primary sexual orientation is toward the same sex and they hold a traditional Biblical orthodox view of sexuality and live a celibate life. To some it may mean they are okay with finding a same sex partner and believe God ordains and blesses them. While others such as myself who were once identified as gay or lesbian now choose to

identify and describe themselves differently. Some identify as ex-gay or ex-lesbian, some as heterosexual, even if they continue to find themselves attracted to their same gender.

### A son of God

I have come to the place of authentically saying I am still attracted to the same sex, but I choose to describe myself as a son of God who at times struggles with same-sex attraction. God clearly called me out of captivity as a once gay-identified man, and called me to place everything in his care, including my sexuality.

Some people insist that because I still struggle with same sex attraction I am gay. That I am lying and not authentic by not taking on this identity label. But I believe that we need to be honest about where we are at. To define our realities is crucial. For myself, I came to realize that my authenticity is in Jesus Christ. And so when I stopped identifying as gay I didn't lose my sense of being, but rather came into the fullness of who I was created to be, a man whose sexuality has been bought and paid for by Christ, a man whose sexuality no longer controls or distinguishes him. Moving beyond this identity descriptor was about coming to

really know myself and the complexities of who I am as a created being. God designed and predestined us all, and desires each of us to come to the knowledge of just how much he loves us.

This is really exciting if you ask me. It isn't a doom and gloom message of give this up, take away that, but a matter of recognizing that all the stuff in my life matters but not so much as to following Christ.

I am honest about my struggle with same sex attraction, but I am much more than this and I have a whole pile of stuff that God is dealing with in me, things that he wants to touch, heal and restore. I have also come to realize that our sexuality is very important to God. The things God created are important and how we define and describe sexuality is not to be based on cultural relevancy. When we realize this, we truly begin to seek our validation and our understanding through him. ↗

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## Classifieds

Birthday	b		
1927 – 2012 With deep thankfulness, we may share the good news that <b>JEENE AMSING</b> hopes to celebrate his <b>85th birthday</b> on Friday, March 16th, 2012 in Clinton, Ont. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren far and near wish him God's richest blessings. We love you Dad/Opa and thank God for you. We give thanks for your love and faithfulness in sharing Christ and God's word with us; sharing your wisdom and providing a safe and caring environment for your children in our younger years; modeling commitment, sacrifice and the joy of nature and gardening. Thank you for your prayers. We pray that you will experience the Lord's love and comforting presence in the days and years ahead. D.V. <i>May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.</i> Romans 15:13	Winterswijk, Gld. 1952 PSALM 121 By God's grace, we are grateful to be able to celebrate the <b>60th Wedding Anniversary</b> of our dear parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents <b>JOHN AND DINIE GREVERS (nee Ruessink)</b> DV on Sunday March 11, 2012 We thank God for you and pray that He will continue to be near to both of you. Much love from your children, 18 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren. Home Address: 28-928 Lorene St., Woodstock ON N4S 5N8	Woodstock, Ont. The children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of <b>JAN AND ALI VAN DER WOERD</b> look forward to celebrating their <b>60th Wedding Anniversary</b> on March 4, 2012. They give thanks for God's faithfulness. God has been gracious! Address: 804-415 Locust St. Burlington ON L7S 2J2	1962 February 24 Hamilton, Ont. 2012 Cambridge, Ont. With thanks to God for his faithfulness, we celebrate the <b>50th Wedding Anniversary</b> of <b>HENK AND INA TIMMERMAN</b> Congratulations Dad & Mom, Opa & Oma! Dave & Marsha Timmerman Bianca, Ian Pete & Catherine Timmerman Nathan, Jessica, Maisha, Nico Sharon & Kevin Vander Meulen Esther, Micah, Owen Rob & Bethany Timmerman Amy, Mason, Brock Psalm 146:5 Mailing address: 61 Woodland Dr Cambridge ON N1R 2X7
<b>Obituaries</b>			
Andre & Roselynn and family Steve & Min and family (Estelle and family) Jim & Thelma and family Coby & Irvin and family Bert & Veronica and family (Adrienne and family) Elizabeth & Rick and family Tom & Nicki and family (Kathy and family) Address: Box 491, Clinton ON N0M 1L0	May 4, 1909 Beilen, Netherlands <b>GRACE DE JONG</b> On Tuesday, the 10th of January 2012, in her 103rd year, the Lord called our mother, grandmother and great-grandmother into his eternal love and joy. Predeceased by her beloved husband Rudolph (1990), great-granddaughter Rachel and son-in-law Bernie Kruisselbrink. Dear mother of Marguerite (Bill) Schenk of Sarnia, Henry (Grace) De Jong of Mount Albert, Eileen (Don) Wallis of Ottawa, Beatrice Kruisselbrink-Huisman (Randall) of Edmonton. Loving grandmother of Ron (Beth) Schenk, Ken (Judy) Schenk, Judy (Ray) Kapteyn, Will (Renee) Schenk, Anita (Phil) Alexander, Teresa (Glen) Wells, Tim (Victoria) De Jong, David (Kathy) Kruisselbrink, Cheryl (Jeff) Gates and Terry (Carolyn) Kruisselbrink. Cherished great-grandmother of 27 great-grandchildren. The funeral service was held January 14, 2012, at First Christian Reformed Church, Sarnia. Correspondence address: Marguerite Schenk 1631 Michigan Line, Sarnia ON N7T 7H4	January 10, 2012 Sarnia, Ontario <b>HELEN (Weverink) HIEMSTRA</b> with full confidence went to be with her Lord. Beloved wife of the late Joe Weverink (1975) and the late Robert Hiemstra (1993). Loving mother of Thea Broer and husband Ed of Aylmer, Tena Dykxhoorn and husband Ron of Collingwood and Leo Weverink and wife Yvonne of Exeter. Dear step-mother to Betty and John Veenendaal, Vickie and Frank Kap, Ken and Lynda Hiemstra all of Sarnia, Terry and Ralph Pittaro of London and Harry Hiemstra of Windsor. Sister to Dubb Romkes, Pie Kraay, Tryntje Reinsma and husband Mins and Meina Romkes. Also survived by many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Predeceased by a daughter, Teuntje Weverink (1943), and a sister, Bertha Klopprogge. Born in Andyk The Netherlands on March 31, 1919, Helen was the daughter of the late Klaas and Tryntje (Keesman) Romkes. Helen formerly lived in Georgetown and Sarnia and lived for a number of years at Heritage Place in Aylmer. She was a member of the Aylmer Christian Reformed Church. Donations in her memory can be made to the Christian school of your choice or the Heart and Stroke Foundation. On-line condolences at kebbelfuneralhome.com	Peacefully at London Health Science Centre University Hospital Feb. 10, 2012 in her 93rd year. <b>REKKEN</b> Rekken, Gelderland Ajax, Ont. Aug. 13 1933 Feb. 1 2012 On Feb. 1, the Lord took home to eternal glory <b>GERRIT (George) RHEBERGEN</b> loved husband of Grace (nee Ellen). Son of the late Peter and Hendrika Rhebergen. Missing him but rejoicing for him are his siblings and inlaws: Sina Rhebergen, Gerrie Boschman, Gerald & Frances, Mary & Albert Smit, Diane Hesselink, Dini Reitsma, Lenie Rhebergen, Elly & Ralph Hoftzey, Bert, John & Rita, Tine & Harry Houtman, Peter & Cathy. Predeceased by siblings and inlaws: Anita, Johanna & Holger Larsen, Berend, Bart Boschman, Johan, Bill Hesselink, Sid Reitsma, Engbert & Ina, Henry. We pray that God will comfort Grace and her family with the loss of a loving husband, father and grandfather. Correspondence: Grace Rhebergen 804 – 2 Westney Rd N Ajax ON L1T 3H3

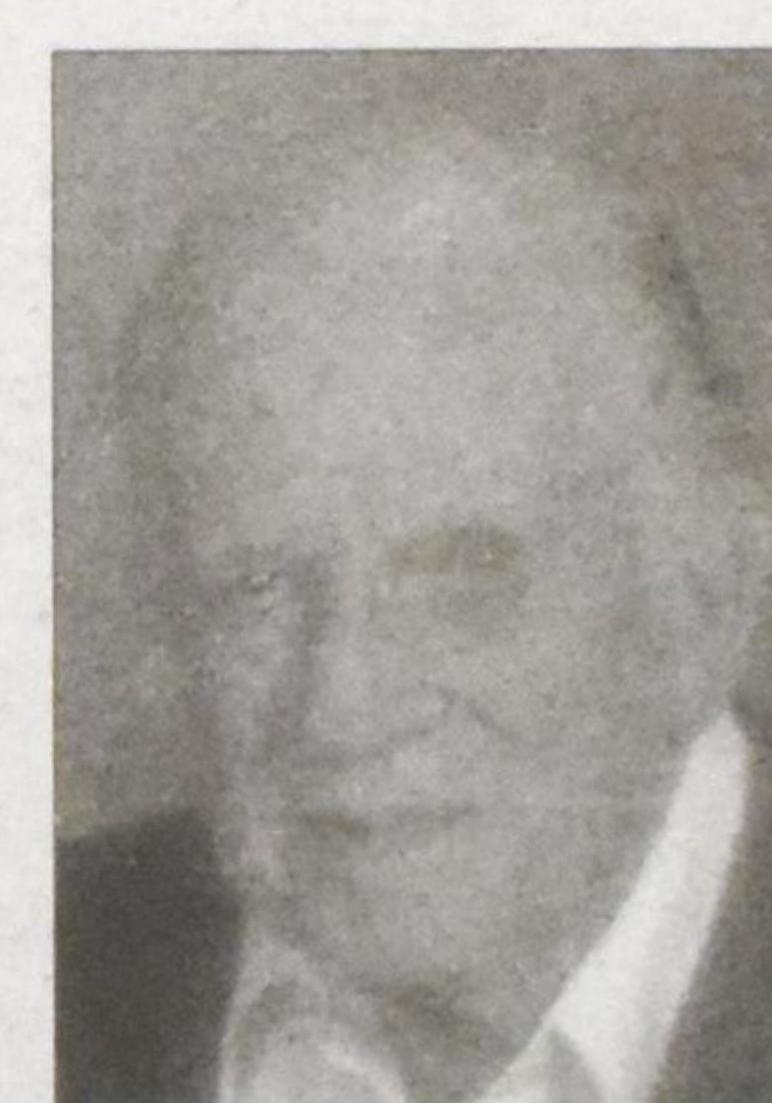
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**JOHANNES (Hans) MEIBOOM**  
Passed away in his 88th year, trusting in God.

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast. Ps. 139:9-10*

He will be missed by his beloved wife of 58 years, Corrie Meiboom (nee van der Werf) his children: John (and his wife Beth Little) Boreas (and his wife Lidia) Frank (and his wife Bev) Carol (and her husband Fred Vellekoop) his grandchildren Lucas (and his wife Sherri), Justin, Nicholas, Daniel, Rebekka, Kristy, Katie, Nicole, Andrew, Eric (and his wife Aleasha), Jackie (and her husband Brandon), and Adam; and his three great-grandchildren Aiden, Kayla and Logan.

Condolences can be placed at:  
[www.weaverfuneralhomes.com](http://www.weaverfuneralhomes.com)

Medemblik The Netherlands December 27, 1919	Aylmer Ontario February 8, 2012
On Wednesday February 8 <b>PETER VYN</b> went home peacefully to be with his Lord and Saviour at the age of 92. Predeceased by his wife Mae (Maartje) (Feb. 8, 2001). Dear father and father-in-law of: Annie and John Streutker of Woodstock Wilma and Ralph Driezen of Springfield Margaret and John Kriense Lokker of Culloden Ralph and Tena Vyn of Belmont Loving Opa of 13 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren. Survived by one sister in the Netherlands. The funeral service took place on Saturday, February 11, at the Christian Reformed Church, Aylmer, Ont. with Rev. Dirk Miedema and Pastor Louis Bosma officiating.	Correspondence address: Ralph Driezen 13943 Imperial Road, R.R. #1 Springfield ON N0L 2J0

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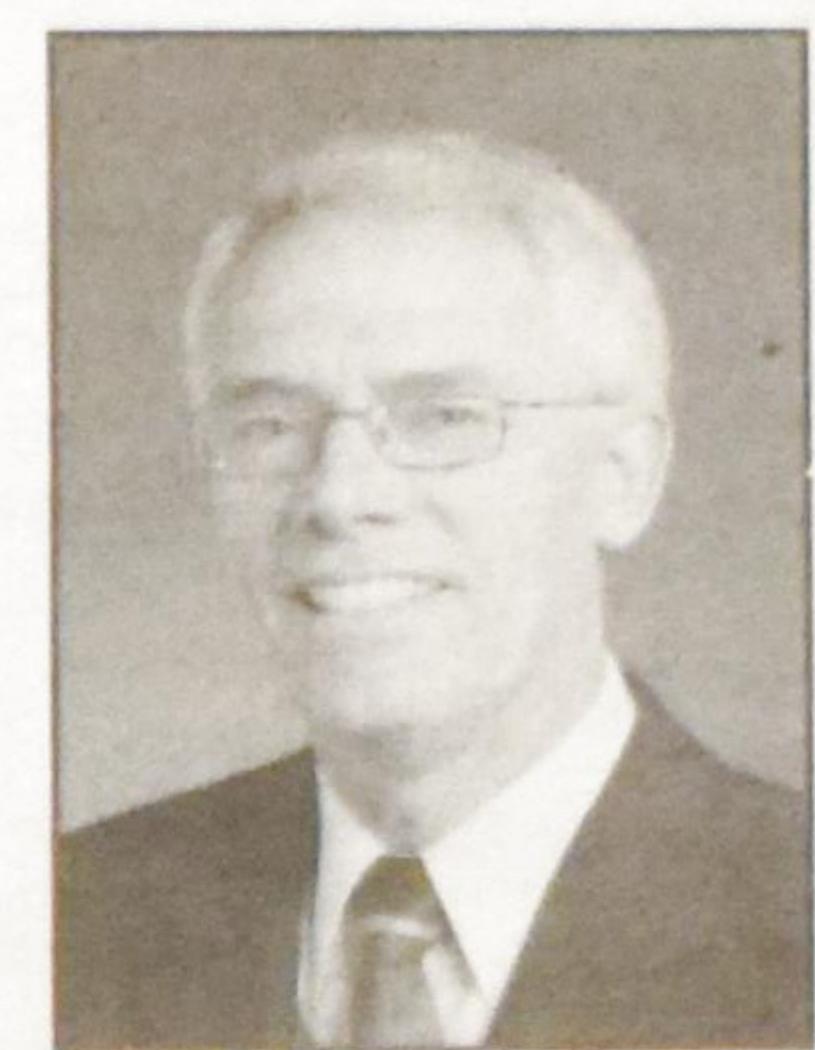
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**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

- Mar 9** Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents 'Wie Kaatst...die Wint.' Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock** 8 pm. See ad.
- Mar 10** Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents 'Wie Kaatst...die Wint.' Market Centre Theatre, **Woodstock** 2:30 pm and 8 pm. See ad.
- Mar 17** Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents 'Wie Kaatst...die Wint.' Memorial Community Hall, **Blyth**. 8 pm. See ad.
- Mar 21** A "Benefit Concert," for Eurovangelism. Liselotte Rokyta on the panflute and Andre Knevel on the organ at Bethel CRC in **Saskatoon** 7:30 pm. Rev. Brian Lise speaking. For more info call Brian 306-382-0714 or email [brian@eurovangelism.ca](mailto:brian@eurovangelism.ca) Learn more about Eurovangelism/EuroAid at [www.eurovangelism.ca](http://www.eurovangelism.ca)
- Mar 22** A "Benefit Concert," for Eurovangelism, Liselotte Rokyta on the panflute and Andre Knevel on the organ at Valley Christian Academy, **Osler** 7:30 pm. Rev. Brian Lise speaking. For more info call Brian 306-382-0714 or email [brian@eurovangelism.ca](mailto:brian@eurovangelism.ca) Learn more about Eurovangelism/EuroAid at [www.eurovangelism.ca](http://www.eurovangelism.ca)
- Mar 23** Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents 'Wie Kaatst...die Wint.' London Dutch Canadian Hall at \* pm. See ad.
- Mar 25** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Klomps will be preaching. DVDs are available.
- Apr 14** Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents 'Wie Kaatst...die Wint.' Great Lakes Christian College, **Beamsville**. 2:30 pm. See ad.
- Apr 20-22** Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. **London, ON** Register at [reformed-me.org](http://reformed-me.org)
- May 1-4** Growing the Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit Guelph Bible Conference Grounds, **Guelph, ON** For information please visit [dunamisfellowshipcanada.org](http://dunamisfellowshipcanada.org) For an event brochure, contact [dfc@dunamisfellowshipcanada.org](mailto:dfc@dunamisfellowshipcanada.org) or 519-821-3603



## The Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group presents "Wie Kaatst...die Wint"

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Saturday March 10th 2012 at 8.00 PM

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Saturday March 17th 2012 at 8.00 PM

London Dutch Canadian Hall in London, Ontario

Friday March 23rd 2012 at 8.00 PM

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## News

## Kim Jong-un: a new young leader for North Korea

Mike Wevers

The grey skies which seem to backdrop every picture from North Korea appeared all the more sullen when that nation's 24 million people mourned the death of their leader at the end of 2011. The Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-il, passed away in December. His youngest son, Kim Jong-un, tapped as his heir apparent some three years ago, now assumes the mantle of leadership of this isolationist country, of which little is known or well understood. The infamous DMZ, the Demilitarized Zone, which separates the north of the Korean Peninsula from the south, also serves to separate the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from the rest of the world.

### The Kim Il-sung dynasty

Kim Jong-un is the grandson of North Korea's most important political figure of the last century, Kim Il-sung. The position into which Kim Jong-un has been



North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong-un.

placed cannot be understood without recognizing the political dynasty he has inherited from his grandfather, and for which his father was in some sense merely the interim keeper. Kim Il-sung's early years reflect that of most revolutionary leaders. Interestingly, Kim Il-sung's history claims he was raised in a Presbyterian family who participated in anti-Japanese imperialism activities, resisting the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula in the early 20th century. With those roots, Kim Il-sung helped evolve small Communist party cadres and served stints in armies that fought invading Japanese forces, all the while assuming progressively more important leadership roles. Stalin chose Kim Il-sung to head North Korea in 1945, following its liberation from Japanese occupation. He immediately established the Korean People's Army, which was vital to his maintaining power and now in launching the leadership of his grandson.



This 1977 propaganda poster portrays Juche as a quasi-religion. Certain religious research sites argue that Juche is, in fact, the world's 10th largest religion.

the intervention of the People's Republic of China pushing back the United Nations and United States forces, which had captured most of the peninsula by 1950. After ensuing years of trench warfare, the conflict ended in the 1953 Armistice Agreement, with the competing forces settling approximately where the DMZ is today.

Even though North Korea would not have survived without the ongoing support of the Soviet Union and China, Kim Il-sung proceeded to separate his Korean Worker's Party from those in the sponsoring countries. He did not want to lose their joint support while relations between the Soviet Union and China deteriorated. While remaining true to the Marxist-Leninist principals of communism as delivered by Stalin and Mao, that the people should rule through a strong central Communist party, Kim Il-sung was determined to develop a separate Korean identity.

His alternative ideology was built on the "Juche Idea," whose guiding principle was that "man is the master of everything." Using a propaganda machine that rivals in reality what Orwell described

fictionally in 1984, Kim Il-sung was able to convince the people of North Korea to subscribe to this Juche ideology as embodied by the Korean Workers Party. Through his party leading the state, North Koreans could become masters of their own destiny and become totally self-reliant. Unlike South Korea, where Buddhism remained strong and Christianity grew rapidly, North Korea drifted further away from any faith life except for the new "Juche" faith in the state.

Kim Il-sung successfully pursued this ideology within North Korea for the five decades he was in power, until his death in 1994. He became so identified with the ideology and the state, that upon his death he was declared Eternal President. The state propaganda machine went into heavy duty action to morph the Juche ideology into one that was inseparable from Kim Il-sung, solidifying a personality cult "worship" of the deceased President.

During his 17 years in power, the son, Kim Jong-il, was unable to match his father's state presence. In fact, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and faltering support from China as it took a bigger role on the world stage, Kim Jong-il led his people through a famine that may have cost up to two million lives and received little support from the country's historical allies. Quite possibly because these events could sew the seeds of discontent, Kim Jong-il instituted the "Songun," or military first policy. This placed the Korean People's Army ahead of the Korean Workers Party in government priority, and makes Ri Yong Ho, Vice Marshal of the Korean People's Army and Chief of the General Staff, the power behind the throne to which Kim Jong-un has now ascended.

### A constant military footing

No peace treaty has ever been signed by the Koreas, so both nations are still officially at war with each other. This may be why North Korea is the most militarized state in the world, keeping a constant vigilant presence to rebuff any attempts by South Korea, or the world, to retake the whole peninsula. Yet, the cost of such a military presence undermines the ability of the country to meet many of the basic needs of its people. And it would have been impossible in

the first place without the support of the Soviet Union and China after the Korean War ended.

While South Korea developed with the assistance of the United States and its military presence, North Korea, devastated by the Korean War, remained impoverished. More recent North Korean military provocations against South Korea, its uranium enrichment program for military purposes and its starving masses resulted in North Korea being branded as part of George W. Bush's "axis of evil" trio (attributed to speechwriter – and Canadian – David Frum) together with Iran and Iraq. While Iraq was invaded subsequent to this Bush speech, there will be no such intervention in the Korean peninsula.

### Kim Jong-un, a new face?

Much has been written recently about how much Kim Jong-un resembles his grandfather, so much so that as he continues to establish his presence any national identity aligned with his father will be quickly erased. At 29, Kim Jong-un is much younger than his father was when he inherited the North Korean leadership; in fact he is the youngest head of state in the world. More importantly, unlike his father, Kim Jong-un is going to outlive the generals and senior party officials that support his leadership. In a balance of power sense, Kim Jong-un could be seen now as merely a puppet of the senior officials who really run this secretive country. However, that is going to change as he remains in power and has a role in choosing replacements for the party and military leadership, with power increasingly shifting to him.

As his power develops, there is some faint hope that given his age and some western education in Switzerland, Kim Jong-un will reinvigorate the process his father started to open North Korea to the world. In a world which needs less confrontation and more peace, that would be a welcome development. It may even give North Korea a brighter future.

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